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## SEAL Committee Policy Update

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### 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.

### Policy area: Work-Based Learning and Skills Programmes

#### Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships

2. The provision of Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) and Graduate Apprenticeship (GAs) remain a ministerial priority in AY 2023-24. FAs and GAs are now embedded into core funding and embedded in SFC's statutory duties. We have not identified a separate credit target for colleges or non-controlled places for universities however there is an expectation that the sector will deliver 2,500 FA opportunities and 1,378 GA places in 2023-24.
3. Skills Development Scotland has reviewed their policy on funding for FA learner travel expenses mindful of the Scottish Government's Young Persons' Free Bus Travel scheme. SDS consulted with all delivery partners including colleges and the outcome is that FA level 6 learners will no longer be funded where the free bus pass is viable for use by the learner to get to their college/employer premises. However, where the free bus pass is not justifiably viable, travel claims up to a maximum of £1,000 per learner or £1,250 if the learner is eligible for a £250 rural uplift. A potential consequence of this policy change may be a reduction in the numbers of school pupils accessing college provision.

#### Development of new GA Frameworks / WBL Qualifications

4. The Scottish Government committed to review the GA programme to support the future strategic direction of GAs in Scotland. It was the intention to set up a Graduate Apprenticeship Enhancement Group to lead the review however this has been delayed as Scottish Government paused development of any additional frameworks until the review concluded. This planned review would explore how GAs can be better targeted as an alternative to first degrees for school leavers, and ensure they are available across key industries where need is identified.
5. Recent discussions with SG has resulted in a change to the policy citing that development of new frameworks could commence in sectors where there is a critical need. The SG Health Department and NHS have identified a priority with Operating Department Practitioners (ODP) where changes to registration will require a degree level qualification from 2024. The development of a GA framework or Work Based learning degree is critical to solving this urgent skills gap and work will commence with university partners, SDS and NHES to develop the qualification.

6. SFC and SDS have received numerous requests for new frameworks from sectors such as Town Planners, Law, and numerous Health and Social Care pathways and are engaging to determine evidence of demand, consideration of other pathways / qualifications and criticality of the skills gap.

## Upskilling and Reskilling Programmes

7. SFC's Upskilling Fund Guidance for AY 2023-24 was published on 22 August 2023. SFC has commissioned EKOS to undertake a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative review of the first three years of the Upskilling Fund. EKOS will provide an evaluation report that will assess the delivery and impact of the first four years of the fund and provide early insights or new developments from delivery in AY 2023-24. We expect this process to provide preliminary findings by December 2023 with a final report in spring 2024. EKOS are preparing to begin their engagement with institutions.
8. SFC is still awaiting response from Scottish Government on funding for the Flexible Workforce Development Fund for AY 2023-24.

## Work force Development and Planning

### Health/Trading Standards workforce planning

9. The Chartered Trading Standards Institute for Scotland's latest workforce survey data will be released at the end of August, and this is expected to summarise a continued worsening picture in the Trading Standards workforce across all Local Authorities. A similar picture is also present in Environmental Health. Work has been progressing with SQA on the new SVQ in Regulatory Services which will be critical for Environmental Health and Trading Standards workforce planning. This will progress to the Apprenticeship Advisory Group on 7 September 2023 for approval as a new MA framework and it is hoped it will be ready for delivery from September 2024.
10. At present there is no dedicated qualification for Trading Standards and only one undergraduate degree for Environmental Health with low uptake. This new MA is expected to provide a much-needed intake of new talent into both workforces across all local authorities and will be delivered by Edinburgh and Ayrshire Colleges.
11. Complementing the work on the new MA, SFC continues to explore ways to align the FE and HE sector's delivery of a range of relevant qualifications to support the needs of these critical workforces as they continue to deal with the varied challenges of Covid and EU Exit.

## Policy Area: Coherent Learning Provision

### Tertiary Provision Pathfinders

12. Since the last report to the SEAL Committee, the Tertiary Pathfinder programme has made progress across the seven collaborative tests of change in the South of Scotland and North East, with broader curriculum planning thematic work and in the initial stages of programme evaluation.

13. The structures around the seven collaborative tests of change are now well established with project leads, and working groups taking forward the development and early delivery of pilot activity. SFC is actively engaged with these groups and represented as a member on many of them. There have been some notable initial outputs and impact from the work including the publication of the [Joint Prospectus](#) for land-based sector, at the launch of which the Principals from the two partner institutions' – Borders College and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) – signed a Statement of Intent. This signaled their ambition to explore options for closer alignment and partnership working.
14. The Pathfinder team with input from two sector experts from Dumfries and Galloway College and the University of Aberdeen in curriculum and provision planning presented to the SFC Board in June on the key emergent themes of the Pathfinder work. The themes include partnership, leadership, employer engagement and the use of data and evidence and their interrelation to the identification of regional priority skills needs and responses to those needs. The team have been active in the two Pathfinder regions working with stakeholders presenting on the work of the Pathfinder and making connections to key planning groups and regional developments.
15. The Regional Delivery Boards (RDBs) were convened in June to reflect on early evaluation discussions and to monitor progress with the pilots. Building on early evaluation work with RDB Members and Project Leads, an external consultant has been commissioned to undertake evaluation of the work of the RDBs, and is currently completing write up after interviewing RDB members from the North East and South.
16. The publication of significant Reviews and Strategies including the Withers Review and Purpose and Principles, have a clear resonance, in terms of regional and broader provision planning and collaboration, with the work of the Pathfinder and the team are endeavouring to make the relevant connections into this work as its shape emerges.
17. Our framework for understanding the programme, introduced at the last meeting, including the Improvement Journey and the six lenses of Coherent Learning Provision, continue to be applied and developed. The most recent version of the six lenses is attached at Annex A. The curriculum planning workstream, which has drawn on input and case studies from two sector expert groups, has synthesized some of the early evidence into an infographic – this has been tested with sector representatives and will be incorporated within the published thematic report (see Annex B).
18. Over the next period the programme will continue to make connections with funding and skills groups in the two regions, produce thematic reports, continue to monitor the work of the pilots, undertake evaluation workshops and host a session on the Hayward Review.

## Gaelic

19. In preparation for the Faster Rate of Progress meeting (twice yearly meeting Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary Ms Gilruth), SFC has been working with the General Teaching Council for Scotland and Bord na Gaidhlig to determine a clear approach to support ambitions around Gaelic Medium Teacher education – specifically through the Teacher Recruitment and Retention workstream. This is recommended to include a

mainstreaming of consideration of GME teacher recruitment and retention within Education planning groups, eg the Teacher Workforce Planning Advisory Group.

## Health

20. The 3-year Memorandum of Understanding and the 2023-24 Joint Action Plan was discussed and agreed by the CEOs at their meeting on 28 June. Both documents were published on the SFC and NES websites [NHS Education for Scotland \(sfc.ac.uk\)](https://www.sfc.ac.uk) and generated more interest than was expected. The [key priorities](#) include increasing the attractiveness, reach and accessibility to learning opportunities (which includes a focus on joining up activities with schools) coherent learning provision, research and innovation and undertaking activities to enhance our understanding of the challenges in the health and social care sector and to explore joint solutions. The focus for the initial workshops will be data collection and use and coherent learning provision, skills, and funding.
21. The SFC/NES Group is in the process of operationalizing the joint action plan, prioritizing the actions, and identifying the resources required to deliver the plan for 2023-2024.
22. The CEOs also asked the SFC/NES Group to develop a reporting mechanism for the Joint Action Plan to enable the respective Boards to monitor progress. The intention is to include SEAL in the reporting mechanism.

## Policy Area: Assurance and Outcomes

### Outcomes Agreements

23. The [Outcome Agreements \(OAs\) for 2022-23](#) were published in July. The achievements identified through these OAs will be published in December 2023 together with those from the 2023-24 OAs – this planned publication will cover both transition years of the OAs.
24. The guidance for the OAs for 2023-24 was published in May and OA Managers are working with universities, colleges, and the regional strategic bodies to agree the content for submission. Feedback on the guidance and timescales for submission has been largely positive from institutions. Once agreed, these will be signed off by the Principals and Chairs of the institutions with submission by the end of October. We intend to publish both the OAs and the achievements report in December 2023.

### Common approach to quality assurance and enhancement

25. There is a separate paper on the tertiary quality project which covers this update.

### UK level quality engagement

26. We have previously reported to SEAL that the SFC was working closely with Scottish Government to explore separate Scottish membership of European Quality Agency Register for Higher Education (EQAR). We can confirm that Scotland is now represented through its own separate [governmental membership of EQAR](#) in addition to through the

membership of DfE International. Importantly, Scotland's country information on EQAR's register shows full compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines.

## College governance review

27. The college governance review continues to be on hold for time being.

## Fair work

28. As the 2022-23 OAs have been finalised and published, we are undertaking an analysis of the OA content about Fair Work. This will be used to develop a paper setting out how institutions are approaching this key priority for Scottish Government and highlighting areas of good practice. Initial analysis suggests that there is variability across institutions and that there may be further work that at least some institutions can do to demonstrate more clearly their commitment to Fair Work and how this is delivered in practice.

## Assurance and accountability approach

29. The work on the assurance and accountability approach is continuing with key highlights as follows:
- Completion of internal mapping work to set out the current assurance and accountability arrangements.
  - External consultation is ongoing with university and college representatives to understand opportunities for:
    - Elimination of duplication of assurance and monitoring information returns between SFC and other agencies.
    - Streamlining assurance and accountability returns, including the possibility of placing reliance on institutions' own document rather than bespoke documentation written for SFC specifically (e.g., the use of strategic plans, business plans and annual accounts to replace some existing aspects of OAs).
    - Identifying appropriate outcomes and measures for each policy area.
  - Further development of SFC's institutional engagement strategy, including defining the evidence base for determining the risk assessment and level of engagement of SFC with institutions.
30. The intention is to continue engagement with institutional representatives and other stakeholders, with a view to drafting a revised approach to assurance and accountability by the end of October. The final version of this approach is expected to be published by the end of January 2024 with implementation in time for the academic year 2024-25.
31. The work on the National Impact Framework is currently paused pending clarity around the detail of the Scottish Government's Purpose and Principles. We have instead adopted a refocused approach to assurance and outcomes, with the development of

outcomes and measures being considered at an institutional level as well as the possibility of aggregating these where appropriate to provide a sector-level picture.

## Policy Area: Student Interests, Access and Pathways

### Report on Widening Access

32. The SFC published the [Report on Widening Access](#) on 25 July 2023. This report provides statistics relating to widening access for AY 2021-22. Headline findings from the report include:

- 5,595 entrants to universities or 16% Scottish FTFD undergrads from SIMD which represents an increase in actual numbers but not the proportion from last year. This means the sector remains broadly on track with the COWA target (more detail is provided on this in the next section).
- 46% of these students came from college (2,570 entrants) making the college sector a crucial asset in sustaining the growth achieved in SIMD20 in the university sector to date but also in growing intake to 18% by 2026 and 20% by 2030.
- 54% of HN students entering university did so with advanced standing i.e. they entered year 2 or 3 of the degree, the student profile of articulating students is very equitable with good representation from SIMD20, men, disability and care experience.
- The college sector continues to have equitable intake in their provision.
- Both sectors have delivered strong intake, comparative to the population, of care experienced learners but success rates in the college sector have dropped.

33. Other findings, provided in the background tables outline that:

- Men are still under-represented in the university sector and have lower retention rates.
- Disability has good representation especially in the college sector and overall retention and success rates are broadly on par with non-disabled students but this does vary by disability type and institution.
- Good reporting in both sectors by trans, sexual orientation and groups such as carers, BSL users and service leavers but a notable difference in the reporting of estranged students which is lower in the college sector.
- Retention rates in the university sector are up on pre pandemic levels but there are variances by group of students and institution.
- Success rates in the college sector vary by types of provision, institution type and student profile. Key groups with lower success are SIMD20, care experience and mental health. The SFC has measures in the Outcome Agreements on SIMD and

care experience and we continue to work with the Scottish Government to outline the issues relating to mental health, particularly in the college sector.

## Progress on the Commission on Widening Access

34. As noted in paragraph 26, on 25 July 2023 SFC published the annual statistical [Report on Widening Access AY 2021-22](#). In 2021-22 there were 5,595 Scottish-domiciled entrants to full-time first-degree courses from the 20% most deprived areas. That represents an additional 80 students compared to 2020-21 and represents 16.5% of all Scottish-domiciled entrants to full-time first-degree courses in 2021-22. While the overall number of students from SIMD20 increased, the proportion from SIMD20 fell slightly from 16.7% in 2020-21 as recruitment increased at a greater level across some other SIMD quintiles (the 20-40% most deprived areas, and 60-80% least deprived areas). However, as it did the previous year, the sector again successfully achieved the Commission on Widening Access first interim sector target of 16% of all Scottish-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants being from the 20% most deprived areas by 2021-22. In 2021-22, with the exception of 2 HEIs in the north east of Scotland and one small rural institution, (previously above target) all institutions were successfully above the 2021 institutional 10% target set by COWA that: *'By 2021, students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 10% of full-time first-degree entrants to every individual Scottish university'*. COWA at that time did recognise the particular challenge that the use of SIMD as a marker for deprivation presents to institutions in the northeast of Scotland. The full institutional breakdown showing progress can be found in [background tables](#) 1B.
35. On 27 July 2023 The Commissioner for Fair Access, Professor John McKendrick, published [Much progress and much to-do: reflections on the published Report on Widening Access 2021-22](#) where he writes that there is much to celebrate in the data but *'there are challenges in the evidence and evidence that challenges our understanding of widening access'*. The First Minister and Cabinet Secretary have re-stated the Scottish Government commitment to delivery of the next interim sector target of 18% by 2026. Prof McKendrick indicated that he will be sharing his views on what is required to meet the interim target for 2026, as part of his first annual report, to be published later in the year. SFC executive continue to engage closely with the Commissioner and will meet with him on 5 September.
36. SFC senior management team considered the potential next steps to enable the SFC and the sector to deliver the next phase of COWA targets. The executive has set up an internal cross directorate short-life working group to develop our evidence and understanding of SIMD20 demand, the pipeline of students coming through the system and university admissions and the context in which actions are taken to support widening access. This group will report to SFC Senior Management team later in the year.
37. In parallel, the Scottish Government access data Short-Life Working Group established 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 has continued to meet, with the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting held in August 2023. Scottish Government

officials intend to report the output of this work to the Ministerial Access Delivery Group in the autumn.

## Counsellor funding

38. The Minister for Higher and Further Education wrote to Colleges Scotland, Universities Scotland and NUS Scotland on 11 July 2023 to announce that the Scottish Government will provide £3.21 million for AY 2023-24 as a one-off funding allocation in respect of mental health and wellbeing support in colleges and universities. The college and university sector and each institution will receive a proportionate share of this one-off funding, informed by their share of the funding for the final year of the previous commitment on counsellors in AY 2022-23.
39. Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland, and NUS Scotland have been consulted during the process of creating the guidance. The guidance and financial proposal now await approval from internal SFC structures, and we hope to publish it in the coming weeks.

## Recommendations

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

## Publication

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

## Further information

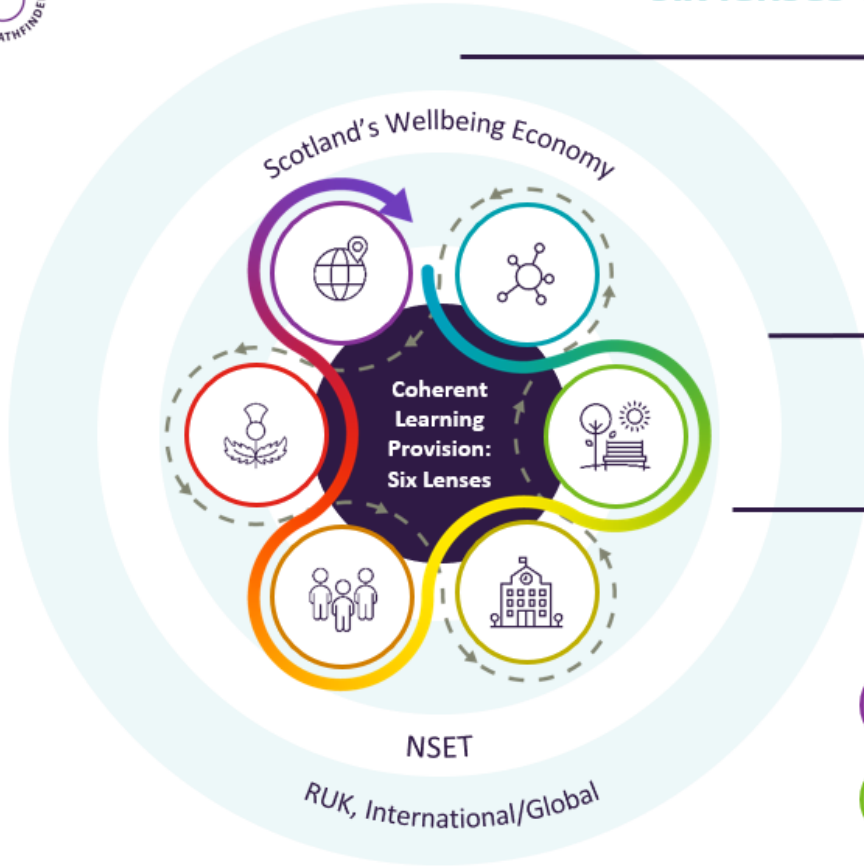
42. Contact: Nick Stansfeld, Policy Officer, [nstansfeld@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:nstansfeld@sfc.ac.uk)



# Annex A



## Six lenses of coherent provision



**RUK, International and Global context:**

- Funding
- World Skills
- Foreign Policy
- Global Climate Emergency

**NSET Ecological ceiling:**

Scotland's nature is protected and restored, and we make a positive contribution to planetary protection

**NSET Social Foundation:**

Sustainable Development Goals / National Performance Framework

 <b>Regional</b>	 <b>Sectoral</b>
 <b>Socio-cultural / Community</b>	 <b>Institutional</b>
 <b>National</b>	 <b>Learner</b>



## Regional

- Clear approaches to skills and provision planning to meet regional need.
- Engagement with City Regions, Local Authorities and other regional stakeholders.
- Schools, colleges, and universities as partners and providers to meet regional need.



## National

- National priorities for the provision of learning and research opportunities are met.
- Systems level governance and funding.
- Engagement with national organisations.
- Impactful continuation to national recovery.
- Mission orientated research.



## Learner

- Clarity of opportunity for learners of all ages and stages.
- Clear, coherent and flexible pathways.
- Engagement with learners and a voice in the enhancement of their learner journey.
- An understanding of well-being and support needs and resources



## Sectoral

- Employer involvement
- Coherent planning for key sectors of the economy and public services
- Sectoral curriculum planning which makes sense at a national, regional and institutional level.
- Opportunity for work-based learning
- Research/knowledge exchange to support innovation and development.



## Institutional

- Institutional sustainability.
- Staff and students as stakeholders.
- Tertiary sector development.
- Schools, colleges, and universities (institutional interests).
- Institutional agency.
- Balance and quality of provision.



## Socio-cultural / Community

- Socio-cultural role of learning provision for thriving communities
- Community wealth building a new people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people.
- 20-minute neighbourhoods The Scottish Government National Planning Framework (NPF4) highlights the application of the 20-minute neighbourhoods to 'our cities, towns, and rural areas so that places where we live, and work are more resilient and sustainable.
- Anchor institutions are large organisations that are unlikely to relocate and have a significant stake in their local area. They have sizeable assets that can be used to support their local community's health and wellbeing and tackle health inequalities, for example, through procurement, training, employment, professional development, and buildings and land use.
- Place-based approaches including, local decision-making and flexibility; use of quality data and information to guide decisions; long term thinking.

## Annex B

