

Disclosable

SEAL Committee minutes

The 8th meeting of the Skills, Enhancement, Access and Learning (SEAL) Committee was held on Thursday 25th May 2023 at 13.30 in The Fleming, Scottish Enterprise offices and by videoconference.

Present:

- Dr Paul Little (Chair)
- Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam
- Professor Ewart Keep
- Andy Kerr
- Anne Campbell
- Donella Beaton
- Ellie Gomersall
- Gordon McGuinness
- Helyn Gould

Officers:

- James Dunphy
- Dr Jacqui Brasted
- Sharon Drysdale
- Erica Russell-Hensens
- Louisa Baker
- Seamus Spencer
- Helen Raftopoulos
- Nicola McGhee
- Dr André Reibig (Secretary)
- Nick Stansfeld (Clerk)

Other:

- Professor John McKendrick, the Commissioner for Fair Access (Item 23/11 only)

Apologies:

- Sheila Duncan
- Kevin Kelman

23/09 Welcome and declarations of interest

The Chair welcomed all Committee members and the executive to the meeting. There was a warm welcome to Louisa Baker, Deputy Director

Governance and Planning, who has a governance overview of the SEAL Committee and other SFC committees.

The following members noted a potential conflict of interest, excluding their main employer:

- Dr Paul Little in relation to City of Glasgow College, Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board, the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce, Co-author of the Cumberford-Little report, the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Vice-Chair of the college sector Employers' Association, Vice Convenor of the College Principals Group, and as Chair of UK Shipbuilding Skills Taskforce.
- Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam in relation to Glasgow School of Art, and as Advisory Board member of a Research Centre at the University of Edinburgh.
- Professor Ewart Keep in relation to Associate Fellow of the Scottish Centre for Employment Research, University of Strathclyde, and as member of the Board of Management at City of Glasgow College.
- Gordon McGuinness in relation to Board member of Glasgow Clyde College, and as Trustee of West College Scotland Foundation.
- Helyn Gould in relation to University of Strathclyde, and as Ordinary Member of Glasgow Colleges Regional Board.
- Anne Campbell in relation to Ayrshire College, and as Chair of CDN's Care Strategy Steering Group.
- Donella Beaton in relation to Robert Gordon University, and with NE Scotland Pathfinder's National Energy Skills Accelerator project.

23/10 [Minutes of the previous meeting: 31 January 2023](#) [SEAL/Min/07](#)

The minute of the 31 January 2023 was confirmed as a true record of the meeting.

Action Tracker

The SEAL Committee received an update on the actions from previous meetings and noted progress to date.

The Action Tracker was also noted, with two actions removed as they are complete:

- Invitation to the Commissioner for Fair Access to the SEAL Committee.
- Feedback given to SFC Communications about the gathering of case studies and use of photographs.

23/11 **Professor John McKendrick, Commissioner for Fair Access** **Oral**

The Chair welcomed Professor John McKendrick, the Commissioner for Fair Access to the meeting.

The Commissioner outlined his background and his emerging thoughts during his first few months in the post. The Committee noted the Commissioner:

- has been in academia all his working life, specialising in poverty and equality.
- is an external member of the programme board for the Scottish Attainment Challenge which seeks to improve educational outcomes in Scotland's most disadvantage communities and achieve equity in educational outcomes.
- is passionate about education, that he feels education provides the opportunity for all to fully realise their potential and is central to its purpose in Scotland. Widening participation is the pinnacle of that goal.
- has met with all HEIs, a number of colleges and many interest groups during his first few months so he is better informed of the issues affecting students and institutions in his drive to upscale the efforts to widen access to FE and HE.
- recognises the sense of purpose and progress in meeting the 2030 targets that one-fifth of entrants to HE should come from 20% most deprived communities in Scotland. He said equity of access to young people and adults is good for the country and can act as an inspiration to those living in deprived communities.
- wishes to rethink the student experience as students need the breadth of the support available to be able thrive during and after their studies. There have been additional challenges during the last few years like the Covid pandemic, and cost of living crisis, which has meant sustaining studies with paid work has become more critical. He doesn't want to lose initiatives that started due to the cost-of-living crisis which benefit disadvantaged students, for example breakfast clubs.
- wants to take a more balanced position to maintain the central focus of the overarching metric (students from 20% from most deprived backgrounds should represent 20% of entrants to HE by 2030) but promote a broader agenda of fair access (SIMD20+). He would like to see institutions receive longer-term investment in widening access activities, not just one year, so institutions/programmes can show greater value, commitment and improve retention of staff.
- recognises his remit is focused on access to HE, however he believes that to make sure young people have access to the right pathway, we

must view the education system as a whole, from primary school to employment.

In discussion, the Committee:

- Welcomed the presentation from the Commissioner and were supportive of equity of access for young people and adults from endemically deprived communities.
- Discussed the importance of data and particularly the tracking of students to follow their educational journey. A unique learner number would track progress from early learning, throughout education and onwards into employment. We noted NHS Scotland has a Community Health Index number for identification, and that in England there is an Individualised Learner Record.
- Encouraged institutions to do more to understand the profile of their students so that they can be better supported to succeed. The Committee understood the complexities of sharing sensitive data however encouraged institutions to use their data more within their own institution to raise success rates and attainment levels.
- Noted the work at the University of Strathclyde on Graduate Apprenticeships to improve retention, progression and attainment, and research, involving Ayrshire College, on articulation data in Health and Social Care which demonstrates the benefits of collaborative working between colleges and universities to widen access and address workforce challenges. Both Strathclyde and Ayrshire offered to forward on the results of the analysis and report with the Commissioner when available.
- Acknowledged the need to balance collaboration and partnership, and the likely increased competition amongst and between colleges and universities seeking to recruit from the same 20% most deprived communities. The Committee discussed the potential of a more nuanced approach to broadening the target as fair access is also about widening the diversity of the student population, particularly at the specialist institutions.
- Extended an invitation to the Commissioner for Fair Access to attend the SEAL Committee on an annual basis.

23/12**Student Interests, Access and Pathways****SEAL/23/04**

The SEAL Committee received a paper on SFC's work in the Student Interests, Access and Pathways team. Erica Russell-Hensens introduced the paper and made a PowerPoint presentation on how SFC is protecting the interests of current and future students.

In discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the contents of the paper and the presentation, that the Student Interests activity is grounded in SFC's statutory framework, the outcomes of the 2021 Review and Strategic Plan 2022-27.
- Acknowledged this was a valuable investment for SFC, and endorsed the approach which will help SFC achieve its goals. The Committee also endorsed the student interest principles to support collaboration and partnership, particularly the co-design with students to help decision making and help identify what works well and where improvement is required.
- Welcomed the system level approach and encouraged the use of case studies to broaden understanding of the lived experience to influence policy.
- Recommended inclusion of students who have experience of employment within the discipline which they are studying.
- Suggested the proposal for students involved in SFC activities to be paid for their time particularly given the current challenging circumstances whereby they may have to balance full-time course work, their study commitments and home life.
- Requested a Student Interests, Access and Pathways update at every second SEAL Committee.

23/13

Outcome Agreements 2023-24

SEAL/23/05

The SEAL Committee received a paper on the proposed arrangements for the development of Outcome Agreements in AY 2023-24.

In discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the tertiary sector Outcome Agreement Guidance AY 2023-24 was published earlier this month, though it may be subject to change depending on content in the Ministerial letter of guidance.
- Noted AY 2023-24 is a transitional year for Outcome Agreement ahead of the development of the new assurance and accountability approach from AY 2024-25 onwards, a broader National Impact Framework and the Government's Principles and Purpose publication.
- Observed the National Student Survey is changing in 2023-24 though Scottish HEIs have chosen to keep the same questions. The Committee noted however trend data should be treated with caution.
- Advised there is likely to be a skills shortage around the transition to net zero in around two years, and that it would be helpful to know what

institutions are doing and trend data, so they are prepared for the rapid need for expansion resulting from the Just Transition Commission's recommendations.

- Advised the new arrangements to assurance and accountability for AY 2024-25 are communicated with institutions as early as possible. It was noted that the new arrangements for 2024-25 should be confirmed by January 2024, with sector communication thereafter.
- Suggested an agenda item on future skills priorities.

23/14 **SEAL Committee policy update** **SEAL/23/06**

The SEAL Committee received an update paper on the key areas of policy within SFC's Access, Learning and Outcomes Directorate.

The Committee also received verbal updates on the seven Pathfinder Regional Pilot projects, the Scottish Government upskilling and reskilling programmes including WorldSkills, and on the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan. The Committee noted the contents of the paper and the verbal updates.

23/15 **SEAL Committee Risk Register** **SEAL/23/07**

The SEAL Committee received a paper on the SEAL Committee Risk Register.

In discussion the Committee noted the SEAL Committee's extract from the SFC Risk Register had been approved by the SFC Board, and that the paper was to raise awareness of potential risks.

23/16 **AOB**

The Chair thanked all the members, the executive and the SFC Chief Executive for their support, and the quality of the papers.

23/17 **Date of next meeting**

The next SEAL Committee is on Tuesday, 12 September 2023.

SEAL Committee Action Tracker

Date	Agenda ref	Action agreed	Update	Timeline	Responsible
14 June 2022	22/08 Policy update	Report on Widening Access – comment included either in report or in press release	The Report on Widening Access 2021-22 was published in July 2023. The Chair is writing a blog on SFC website, published by 30/09/23.	September 2023	Erica Russell Hensens
31 January 2023	23/01 Policy update	SFC executive to discuss issues about health with Care Strategy Steering Group and NHS Scotland Academy.	SFC Officers have attended all the NHS Scotland Youth Academy regional educational huddles to discuss the Joint Action Plan, which was signed by the CEOs in June 2023. We will add a discussion on Health and Social Care to the next SEAL Committee agenda.	December 2023	Elizabeth Shevlin
31 January 2023	23/02 National Equality Outcomes	SFC executive to consider the use of data on intersectionality of students and impact on success rates and retention, and the evaluation of school college partnerships and reasonable adjustments for disabled students as a thematic theme.	The measurement framework for the National Equality Outcomes is being developed internally and further updates will be provided in due course.	December 2023	Erica Russell Hensens
25 May 2023	23/11 Commissioner for Fair Access	University of Strathclyde GA analysis findings and the Health and Social Care report, involving Ayrshire College to be forwarded to the Commissioner when ready.	The Health and Social Care report has been forwarded to the Commissioner. The Strathclyde analysis findings will be forwarded once finalised.	December 2023	Nick Stansfeld
25 May 2023	23/11 and 23/12 Forward agenda items	1. Invitation to Commissioner for Fair Access: annual basis. 2. Student Interests, Access and Pathways update: at next but one meeting.	SEAL forward agenda is on the agenda at SEAL Committee on 12 September 2023	12 Sept 2023	Nick Stansfeld