

The 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Skills, Enhancement, Access and Learning (SEAL) Committee was held on Wednesday 28 October 2020 at 2.00pm by video-conferencing.

**Present:** Dr Paul Little (Chair)  
Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam  
Professor Ewart Keep  
Andy Kerr  
Sheila Duncan

**Officers:** Dr Andre Reibig (Secretary)  
Martin Fairbairn  
Linda McLeod  
Maggie Wightman  
Karen Watt (items 20/02 and 20/03)  
Fiona Burns (item 20/02)  
Sharon Drysdale (item 20/03)  
Derek Horsburgh (items 20/05 and 20/06)  
Keith Coyne (items 20/05 and 20/06)  
Nick Stansfeld (Clerk)

**Guests:** Janie McManus, Education Scotland (item 20/05)  
Gill Ritchie, Education Scotland (item 20/05)  
Alastair Delaney, QAA (item 20/05)

**Apologies:** None

**20/01 Welcome and declarations of interest**

The Chair welcomed all Committee members and the executive to the first meeting of the SEAL Committee.

The Chair reminded Council board members of their responsibility to indicate if they had, or may be perceived to have, a conflict of interest under any item.

The following members noted a potential conflict of interest:

- Dr Paul Little in relation to City of Glasgow College, Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board, the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and as co-author of the Cumberford-Little report
- Andy Kerr in relation to South Lanarkshire College and New College Lanarkshire

- Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam in relation to Glasgow School of Art
- Professor Ewart Keep in relation to his role as an Associate Fellow of the Scottish Centre for Employment Research, University of Strathclyde.

**20/02**                      **Note of Council board members discussion on 12 August 2020**  
**(SEAL/20/01)**

The note of the 12 August meeting was **confirmed** as an accurate record of the meeting.

**20/03**                      **An integrated, connected tertiary education and skills system for learners and employers**  
**(SEAL/20/02)**

The SEAL Committee received a paper on the learner journey aspects of Theme 3 from the recently published Phase One Report of the SFC Review of Coherence and Sustainability.

The SEAL Committee welcomed the paper and covered the following matters in discussion:

- Noted that although it was discussing theme 3 of the Phase 1 Report, all ten themes should be considered together when progressing this work.
- Noted the importance of an integrated tertiary system that protects the differentiated strengths and uniqueness of the institutions.
- Noted the call for greater collaboration among institutions. We should be clear on the core purpose of the collaboration from the start and analyse the options objectively.
- Acknowledged there needs to be a clear narrative on what SFC hopes to achieve from the Review. SFC will need to make some difficult choices in the development of the new integrated tertiary model.
- The impact from the Report is likely to be felt for the next 25-30 years. Acknowledged it is essential that SFC has Ministerial backing.

**20/04**                      **Apprenticeships: Foundation and Graduate**                      **(SEAL/20/03)**

The SEAL Committee received a paper on the development of plans to establish a sustained funding model for Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) and Graduate Apprenticeships (GA).

In further discussion the SEAL Committee:

- Noted a short-life joint FA/GA working group will be established to take forward the work, the membership of which will be the same as the previous FA/GA working group.
- Noted the working group will also develop an engagement plan to involve key stakeholders, including employers. It will tap into the employer networks, various industry leadership groups, economic forums, and Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board. SEAL members also offered to help to fast-track engagement with employers. The Committee noted that FAs and GAs are distinct training and learning offerings with different demand and placement challenges.
- Acknowledged the difference between FA and GA in terms of volume and demographic. GAs were more likely to be older, however it was noted that some employers are recruiting GAs direct from school.
- Noted Covid-19 presents significant challenges for the sector and students, and to FA and GA modelling, including the difficulties of work-based learning while working from home; future plans will need to be Covid-proof.
- Suggested that the executive develop a route map for sustaining the planned volume of FAs and GAs against the challenges posed by the Covid-19 crisis to employers and trainees respectively whilst also expanding the College sectors delivery of GAs.

**20/05**

### **Outcomes and Impact Framework 2020-21 and beyond**

**(SEAL/20/04)**

The SEAL Committee received a paper on SFC's refreshed Outcomes and Impacts Framework for AY 2020-21.

In the discussion that followed the SEAL Committee:

- Noted SFC will ask institutions for an in-year report in February 2021 and an end of year reporting, including an impact statement on the outcomes for students, research and the economy.
- Noted given the emergency years there would be no new targets in the Framework 2020-21. Instead there would be expectation of a commitment to maintain, wherever

feasible, the 2018-19 baselines. As the impact of the Covid-19 crisis is becoming more apparent, there is a need for rebasing and revisiting our expectations in return for public funds including the need for greater tertiary system collaboration.

- Recognised the negative impact from the Covid-19 crisis will be enormous and will be felt beyond the next 5-10 years. We may have to accept that there will be many negative impacts on the labour market for college and university leavers and their potential to get and retain a job and on their future earnings.
- Acknowledged learner's mental health and physical wellbeing should be included in the Framework.
- In the context of this discussion the Chair made the Committee and the executive aware of the very recent report by the Commission of the College of the Future, which will also develop a bespoke report for Scotland and the other UK nations.

**20/06**

**Quality assurance and enhancement**

**(SEAL/20/05)**

The SEAL Committee received a paper on the work of Education Scotland and QAA Scotland outlining how they have responded to the challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The SEAL Committee welcomed the updates from Education Scotland and QAA Scotland. In discussion, the SEAL Committee:

- Noted the challenging circumstances due to the pandemic with colleges and universities needing to move to 100% remote emergency teaching, support and assessment. After the initial response phase we were now in a period of consolidation. The next phase will be providing assurance to SFC and other stakeholders that colleges and universities are providing learners with a high quality, safe and supportive learning environment.
- Noted each quality assurance agency has a lead officer for each institution who has detailed knowledge of that institution and is in regular engagement to support improvement.
- Noted the shift in the student experience with most of the teaching now being delivered online and with adverse outcomes for practical in-person training. There is now an

opportunity to share good practice and to learn from experience among colleges and universities.

- Acknowledged students might put up with one term's disruption but that dissatisfaction could be cumulative i.e. satisfaction levels will drop after two months of disrupted learning should it continue into the next semester and beyond with potentially poorer retention and achievement rates.
- Noted the importance of students having a safe learning place. Colleges and universities are aware of digital poverty and are taking actions to address the challenges of poor connectivity and spaces for learning for some student groups.
- Acknowledged the potential difference in responses to the current learning environment between those returning for a second year who had a different experience in year one, and new entrants.
- Noted that the Covid-19 crisis has a fundamental impact on access, delivery and assessment of learning and the overall learning experience. Going forward the Committee recommended that both the QAA and Education Scotland who assess the quality of teaching and learning in universities and colleges, on behalf of SFC, bring forward an action plan how to address the complex challenges posed by Covid-19 going forward into 2021 and beyond highlighting the continued need for instructional scrutiny and enhancement.

**20/07**

**Date of the next meeting**

The date of the next meeting is likely to be in February or March 2021.