

SFC and Scottish Government joint working

- This paper provides an update to the Council on the action taken and work underway to support better joint working between Scottish Government (SG) and SFC, in order to deliver on the Ministerial priorities set out in annual letters of guidance.
- The senior teams established the following objectives for the working together project, building on the ambition that we take a 'one team' approach:
 - A one team approach characterised by mutual trust, respect and openness, with clear roles and responsibilities.
 - Making the best use of our individual and collective expertise and resources.
 - Develop the capacity of whole organisations to work collaboratively.
- Good progress has been made to date and we will continue to implement the action plan set out at the Annex.

Recommendation

- The Council is invited to note this paper and the progress with the joint working initiative.

Financial implications

- There are no direct running cost or programme fund implications arising from this paper.

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Purpose

1. This paper provides an update to the Council on the action taken and work underway to support better joint working between Scottish Government (SG) and SFC, in order to deliver on the Ministerial priorities set out in annual letters of guidance.

Context

2. As a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB), the SFC is sponsored by a SG Directorate, the Advanced Learning and Science (ALS) Directorate. The sponsorship relationship underpins all of Government's engagement with its NDPBs, setting the strategic priorities and establishing the framework of assurance, governance and performance management within which all other activities sit. The SG guidance on sponsorship sets out the following areas in which a sponsor team will provide direction and seek assurance: strategic direction; accountability; planning and performance; financial controls, audit, reports and accounts; an effective board; and aspects of Human Resources management including Chief Executive recruitment and remuneration.
3. With the appointment of a new Chair for the SFC and the refreshing of the Sponsorship Unit in the ALS Directorate, the SG and SFC took the opportunity to review the working relationship, and the underpinning systems and processes between the SG and SFC. In doing so, we reflected on and learnt from both the strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches and previous approaches. That analysis is captured in the table at the Annex.

Respective roles and responsibilities

4. A key foundation of improving joint working was ensuring there is clarity about the respective roles and responsibilities of the SG and SFC in developing and delivering on Ministerial priorities in relation to further education, higher education and research. That is captured clearly in the cycle described as: SFC advise, Ministers decide, SFC implement. Our 'working together' project has focused on the systems, processes, behaviours and mindset which SG and SFC must have in place to better support this.

Objectives and progress to date

5. The senior teams of the SFC and ALS Directorate established the following objectives for the working together project, building on the ambition that we take a 'one team' approach:

- A one team approach characterised by mutual trust, respect and openness, with clear roles and responsibilities.
 - Making the best use of our individual and collective expertise and resources.
 - Develop the capacity of whole organisations to work collaboratively.
6. Through close engagement, including two facilitated workshops between the SG and SFC senior teams, a programme of activity was established. The table at the Annex details the action taken forward under each of these headings.
7. Significant developments to date include:
- The close and productive joint working to support the successful introduction of Outcome Agreement intensification.
 - The more routine involvement of SFC staff in briefing Ministers directly.
 - The production of formal progress and risk reports for Ministers on a quarterly basis.
 - Increased frequency of Ministerial meetings with the Chair and Ministerial attendance at the Council.
 - More senior and frequent SG engagement at SFC Council and Finance Committee.
 - The development of protocols to support how we work together, including in areas such as FOI.
 - An overhaul of financial monitoring requirements leading to a more streamlined process.
 - Regular attendance by senior staff at one another's senior management meetings.
8. The improvements in the sponsorship function were verified in an SG internal audit report in April, with 'substantial assurance' for the SFC sponsorship arrangements, noting that "The Team has adopted a range of best practice, including adherence to the SG's guidance on sponsorship arrangements".

Next steps

9. The SG and SFC senior teams will continue to implement the action plan set out at the Annex. In terms of future focus, the senior teams have agreed to apply the now established principles and approaches of joint working to: the Learner

Journey Review implementation; the 19-20 budget process; and the next steps on Outcome Agreement intensification, in the context of the Strategic Plan for Enterprise & Skills; and possibly our approach to Brexit readiness.

Risk assessment

10. This work addresses the risks that would be associated with an ineffective and inefficient working relationship between SFC and SG.

Equality and diversity assessment

11. An equality and diversity assessment has not been carried out.

Recommendation

12. The Council is invited to note this paper and the progress with the joint working initiative.

Financial implications

13. There are no direct running cost or programme fund implications arising from this paper.

Publication

14. This covering paper will be published on the Council website following the meeting. The Annex will be withheld from publication on SFC's website under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, Section 30: prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.

Further information

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