

## **SFC Call for Evidence: A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in FE and HE**

### **Response from SCQF Partnership**

The SCQF Partnership welcomes the opportunity to be able to comment on this call for evidence and we have concentrated on those particular areas where we are best placed to offer opinion through experience. We have therefore reviewed the questions carefully and selected those where this is the case.

- a) What do you think works well in the current further and higher education arrangements that we should keep in order to secure Scotland's inclusive social and economic recovery from the current pandemic? How can we best preserve and strengthen those features of education, research and innovation in Scotland that we most prize, in a very challenging funding environment?**

Scottish institutions are particularly strong at identifying joint opportunities in order to benefit their local economy and more widely, the Scottish economy, particularly in terms of developing partnerships and pathways across specific sectors. This work will be vitally important in the future as there will ultimately be a change in focus for some sectors, and institutions will need to be able to respond to that. Using the SCQF to better identify existing pathways and create new ones will be vital to ensuring recognition and currency of qualification routes.

- b) What do you think colleges, universities and specialist institutions should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery? (You may wish to comment on teaching and skills development, sectoral and employer needs and employability, research, innovation and knowledge exchange, widening access and equalities issues.)**

A more seamless learner journey is still required in many areas of education. Whilst more pathways are being developed there are still issues and inconsistencies around Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and learners having to repeat learning unnecessarily particularly in terms of accessing and progressing into higher education. A more joined up approach to RPL is still needed if we are to make best use of individual skills particularly in the coming year as well as benefiting our economy in the longer term. RPL policies across HEIs are disjointed and even vary internally between departments. A more coherent strategy is required from government to ensure consistency across institutions in relation to RPL which will bring a wide range of benefits.

Better use of the SCQF is also required by institutions in order to support sectoral and employability needs. As mentioned earlier, Institutions are good at developing provision and pathways that meet a need for their area or a particular sector but not always good at taking it that step further and credit rating it onto the SCQF in order to ensure coherency and recognition in terms of the learning journey. We would like to see a more joined up approach to creating and recognising learning pathways and would offer support to institutions in how to do this.

- c) How can colleges, universities and specialist institutions best support Scotland's international connectedness and competitiveness in the post-pandemic, post-EU membership environment?**

Brexit is already causing challenges across Scottish education with Scottish institutions unable to access funding or finding themselves excluded from valuable collaborative work with their European counterparts. A joined up approach and strong partnerships between institutions and other stakeholders within and outwith education is the key to ensuring Scotland remains connected and competitive. For instance, the SCQFP is actively building relationships with Scottish institutions to be able to offer benefits in terms of access to a world renowned National Qualifications Framework and the expertise that can offer as added value to a particular project or piece of work. Equally we are ensuring that Scottish institutions are included and showcased where possible in the work we do with governments across the world, particularly in terms of our study visits which will be moving online for the foreseeable future. SCQFP also continues to operate as the National Co-ordination point for the EQF at the current time and will continue to seek ways post-Brexit to keep those links with EU member states which encourages the recognition of SCQF credit rated learning and assists learner mobility.

**d) What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges, universities and specialist institutions? For institutional leaders, how are you planning to address these challenges and opportunities?**

There will inevitably be a high number of individuals being made redundant as a result of the pandemic who will need/want to upskill and/or re-skill. The development of accessible and relevant online learning will be vital and micro-credentials will be key to making this happen. Institutions have the capability to design, develop and deliver high quality online learning and this can be recognised on the SCQF by those institutions through credit rating so that those qualifications carry both credit and currency in a rapidly changing environment. In addition, RPL will be needed to assist individuals to achieve full recognition of courses and qualifications which they have been unable to complete as a result of the Pandemic interrupting their studies.

**e) What forms of collaboration within the tertiary education eco-system would best enable a coherent and effective response to these challenges and opportunities?**

We highlighted some of the challenges with the learner journey earlier in this response. Collaboration is key between FE and HE institutions to create those articulation routes that are needed to help individuals progress seamlessly, quickly and efficiently through their chosen learning journey without any dead ends or repetition. For instance, Institutions could consider collaborating on guaranteed articulation routes using the SCQF.

**f) How can SFC, alongside government and other enterprise, skills and education-focused agencies, best support colleges, universities and specialist institutions to make their full contribution to Scotland's inclusive, green and education-led recovery? In particular, you may wish to draw out:**

- **How scarce public resources should be prioritised to drive recovery**
- **Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions**
- **Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery**
- **How SFC's funding and accountability frameworks should ensure that equality and wide access to educational opportunity are promoted as key elements of the recovery for younger people and adults**
- **What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment**

The SCQF Partnership offers a wide range of free support to all institutions in terms of credit rating learning programmes onto the Framework including micro-credentials. This includes free training courses and one to one advice and support.

The SCQFP is the organisation in Scotland responsible for providing guidance on all aspects of RPL for institutions. The Principles for RPL are provided in the SCQF handbook and the SCQFP provides a range of free resources and advice in this area including workshops and an interactive RPL tool. SFC and Government should develop a consistent line on how RPL principles should be

used and embedded within institutions to ensure that learners get a fair and consistent approach to recognition.

This guidance is also provided for employers who will increasingly need to think more smartly about their skills requirements and staff development post pandemic.

The SCQFP is also involved in the recognition of skills across different groups such as veterans, migrant workers and young people and has developed resources for recognising those skills and benchmarking them to the SCQF so individuals can clearly see the level of their skills and think about the next steps in their learning journey with the support of an adviser. These resources can be easily adapted for different user groups and used by both institutions and other bodies such as Skills Development Scotland to help those who will inevitably need to change direction post pandemic. The resources could also be tailored to meet the needs of particular sectors hardest hit through the pandemic.

The expansion of the FWDF is to be welcomed and would allow more to be done to meet employers needs in a tailored way. We know these needs are likely to change and evolve and we need a mechanism which allows that to happen. We know from evidence already in the public that microcredentials, gap filling and upskilling will all be key to business for the foreseeable future. We would like SFC to consider whether there should be a stronger link between the outcomes of FWDF and the SCQF? We accept that not all learning should or could be credit rated but we do see huge advantages for employers and their employees of where possible being able to get credit through our national system for learning achieved in the workplace.