



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoinachaidh na h-Alba

Call for Evidence: A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education



SFC Call for Information

Issue Date: 20 July 2020

A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education: Call for Evidence

1. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is the national, strategic body that funds further and higher education, and research, in Scotland. We have been asked by Scottish Ministers to review how best we can fulfil our mission of securing coherent provision by post-16 education bodies, and the undertaking of research, in these changing times. A [briefing note on the review](#) can be found on the SFC website.
2. We invite all interested individuals and organisations to submit evidence to help inform and shape our review. We particularly welcome responses from colleges and universities, students and learners, graduates, industry and employers, local government, equalities interests, unions, quality assessors, other SFC funded bodies, professional representative bodies and academies. Annex A lists the key stakeholders we anticipate will be interested in responding to this call for evidence.
3. It would be helpful if you could provide succinct submissions by **10 August 2020**. We would welcome evidence and data that supports your view. You may choose to respond to any aspect of this review; and any or all of the specific questions we pose, as we recognise the inter-connectedness of many of the themes. Please complete the attached respondent information form (Annex B) when submitting your response.
4. This will not be your only opportunity to contribute to our review. We are planning to undertake the review in a number of phases and to elicit views in different ways, including further calls for evidence. We anticipate that responding organisations will wish to provide additional input and evolving views as the review progresses.
5. In this first phase of our review we are interested in your views on these six areas in particular:
 - 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?
 - 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.)

- c) How can colleges, universities and specialist institutions best support Scotland's international connectedness and competitiveness in the post-pandemic, post-EU membership environment?
- 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?
- e) What forms of collaboration within the tertiary education eco-system would best enable a coherent and effective response to these challenges and opportunities?
- 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

6. Please send your response or any queries to reviewsecretariat@sfc.ac.uk by **10 August 2020**. We look forward to receiving your views.

SFC Review Secretariat
July 2020

Stakeholders likely to be interested in responding

- Colleges, universities, specialist institutions (and their representative bodies) and other funded bodies
- UK counterparts
- Audit Scotland, Education Scotland and QAA
- Enterprise & Skills Strategic Board and agencies
- NUS, sparqs, student bodies, learners, SAAS
- Employers and industry
- NHS
- RSE
- Cultural bodies
- Trade Unions
- EHRC and equality interests
- Local Authorities and Scottish Cities Alliance
- Expert advisers, e.g. Chief Scientific Adviser
- Development bodies, e.g. College Development Network (CDN), Advance HE
- Community and adult learning

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Summary: This publication invites all interested individuals and organisations to submit evidences to help inform the SFC review of coherent provision and sustainability in Further and Higher Education.

FAO: Colleges and universities, students and learners, graduates, industry and employers, local government, equalities interest groups, unions, quality assessors, other SFC funded bodies, professional representative bodies and academies

Further information: **Contact:** Review Secretariat
Email: reviewsecretariat@sfc.ac.uk

The Scottish Government is strongly committed to ending Scotland's contribution to climate change and creating a fair, successful and green economy. The delivery of the Scottish Government Net Zero 2045 target represents both a major challenge and an opportunity that requires a systemic, collaborative approach across Scotland, the UK and internationally. This is a cross-sectoral challenge extending beyond the energy sector and beyond our local activities in the UK across our international markets and supply chains. Our departure from the EU and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have introduced further critical and complex challenges, needs and opportunities around health, economic stability, supply chain resilience and sustainability.

Most developed nations have positioned science, engineering and technology at the core of their economy and explicitly acknowledged these within post-pandemic economic recovery strategies. Research and development in engineering and its associated technologies has an increasingly vital role to play in providing solutions to the complex challenges faced and in continuing to preserve and sustain the economic and social well-being of Scotland and the UK through these challenging times. It is vital that Scotland continues to invest in priority areas of R&D and Innovation in engineering, science and technology to maintain its record of academic research excellence and future-proof Scotland's socio-economic health.

The UK Government has set an ambitious target to increase GDP investment in R&D from 1.7% to 2.4% by 2027, with a longer-term goal of 3%. **Within Scotland, a key challenge remains to increase R&D investment principally from the business sector in order to drive green economic growth and recovery.** The high quality of engineering research delivered across Scotland's universities and the ability of businesses to collaborate effectively with the university sector to seek innovative solutions for business-critical challenges are key factors in attracting early stage investment in R&D to Scotland. Increasing BERD (business enterprise R&D expenditure) drives overall business and supply chain growth and resilience as the delivery of new innovative products and solutions capture global supply chain and market share. Furthermore, the continued strengthening of the academic-industry engineering collaborative R&D portfolio and provision of high-value engineering and digital skills through close collaboration between universities acts as a catalyst to attract increased foreign direct investment (FDI), further strengthening the Scottish economy.

Outcome and impact focused pan-Scottish university research collaborations - such as the Scottish Research Partnership in Engineering (SRPe) - are pivotal to harnessing the collective power of the Scottish higher education sector in terms of providing research solutions and high-value skills, and are critically important to the future of the Scottish economy. They are central to delivery of SFC's

strategic objectives for promotion and growth of world leading research, and delivery of sustainable economic growth through research, innovation and skills creation.

Over the last 15 years investment in engineering research pooling and collaborative programmes by the SFC and the Scottish universities has been highly successful and has had a major impact in strengthening Scotland's economy and international research standing. It has added significant value in terms of leveraging industrial and other external investment towards collaborative research, provision of high-value skills and delivery of innovative solutions to tackle complex challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, engineering research pooling provides an effective national platform for strategic-level engagement between academia and key stakeholders across government, public sectors agencies and industry and serves as an effective portal for the provision of specialist technical advice to Scottish Government and other key stakeholders.

The national and international funding environments are becoming increasingly complex and competitive. **Engineering research pooling provides the necessary critical mass for Scotland to compete more effectively for UK and international research funding and plays an important role in raising Scotland's international profile (viz UKG commitment to invest £22Bn in R&D and innovations by 2024).** It also supports the continuation and growth of the existing productive links with European research groups (many of them in a leadership role) in post-EU membership conditions. It enables effective strategic-level collaboration between key organisations within the Scottish ecosystem, across colleges, universities, research pools, innovation centres, industry, industry bodies, RTOs and public sector agencies / government.

SRPe exemplifies the power of the triple-helix of strategic collaboration between academia, industry and the public sector in addressing challenges and opportunities of critical national priority to support the Scottish Government Economic Strategy and the post-pandemic Green Economic Recovery. A recent example is the collaborative activities underway between SRPe and the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS) in its capacity to support the Scottish Government COVID-19 Response for delivery of critical PPE and medical equipment. SRPe is now expanding its collaborative pandemic response and resilience activities beyond its advanced manufacturing theme across its robotics and autonomous systems, healthcare, infrastructure and environment themes to address other critical pandemic-related challenges and opportunities such as remote disinfection of hospitals and transport, and novel materials / antimicrobial surfaces to reduce the potential for virus surface transmission. These activities are being developed in collaboration with NMIS and other key SRPe partners across

the research, innovation, public sector, industrial and technology end-user landscape.

Engineering research collaboration also plays a vital role in supporting the digital and green transformation of Scottish industries towards Industry 4.0 providing an effective mechanism for delivery of high-value skills across engineering and manufacturing, and a key pathway for enhanced technology transfer, knowledge exchange and outreach across the regions of Scotland. It provides an effective strategic platform, in collaboration with the innovation centres and other RTOs, to support the translation of key research outcomes to innovative technology solutions for industry and other key technology end-users.

Given the challenging environment, further strengthening of the strategic relationship between SRPe and Scottish Enterprise (SE), Highlands and Island Enterprise (HIE), Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and Scottish Development International (SDI) is essential to support sustainable green economic growth, address critical skills gaps, raise the international profile and outreach of Scotland and attract increased investment, including foreign direct investment (FDI). Development of a more robust coherent international outreach and knowledge exchange strategy developed collaboratively between academia, industry and the enterprise agencies would be effective in driving enhanced promotion of Scotland on the international stage, and in targeting key countries of strategic opportunity.

Closer alignment of the skills development strategies between colleges and universities, for sectors critical to economic recovery and growth is important for effective and inclusive provision of the necessary skills to industry / SMEs. A good example is the skills pyramid within the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland (NMIS) Manufacturing Skills Academy that makes provision for the development of skills at all levels essential to the manufacturing industry, and includes multiple pathways for inclusive access to professional development and training.

Given the acutely challenging post-pandemic and post-EU membership environment, the pooling of Scotland's engineering research expertise and resources for delivery of complex whole-system cross-disciplinary solutions, coupled with strong **cross-sectoral strategic collaboration between academia, business and the public sector, has never been more critical.**

To adapt to the changed environment, address the key challenges, develop future resilience, and fully exploit the potential opportunities around Scotland's sustainable green economic recovery, it will require strategic prioritisation of resources to address the most critical challenges and those with the highest potential for socio-economic impact. Given the core role of engineering research

and innovation in driving economic growth and economic recovery a step-change in the scale of investment in engineering research collaboration is essential.