



## **Scottish Funding Council Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education**

### **UNISON Scotland Response. Aug 2020**

UNISON is Scotland's largest trade union with members delivering public services across the public, private and third sector. UNISON is the largest union representing professional and support services staff in Scottish colleges and universities. These institutions are important in the training and professional development of UNISON members across a vast range of occupations, so our interest in the well being of the tertiary sector is both deep and wide ranging. We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the Funding Council's review.

In this response we will deal with the questions put by the Funding Council on a sectoral basis. First further and then higher education.

#### **Further Education**

*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?*

One role that colleges currently play that will need to be developed and expanded if we are to have "an inclusive economic and social economic recovery" is that of anchor institutions. By this term we mean institutions which are important local economic actors which are both capable of aim at developing long term relationships with local partners – particularly the public sector and locally based small and medium enterprise. Obviously further a education's economic impact extends well beyond how much institutions directly spend or invest in the local economy. To cite just one of many possible examples the Fraser of Allander Report 2017 [The Value of College Graduates to the Scottish Economy](#) (seven years after major reshaping of the sector). This outlined how colleges play a crucial role in developing Scotland's growth potential through enhancing human capital – whether that be providing routes from school to work, further training or university; continuous skills-development (often in conjunction with employers); or re-training people for new opportunities. By developing a more productive workforce and boosting participation, colleges help deliver long-term sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Sustainable growth is more important than ever given the new revenue raising responsibilities of the

Scottish Parliament. For the period 2008/09-2015/16 graduate cohorts it was estimated that the Scottish economy (as measured by GDP) was better off by over £20 billion in present value terms (i.e. with future benefits discounted) over the long-term. This corresponds to around an additional £55,000 boost to productivity for the Scottish economy.

When it comes to an inclusive social and economic recovery, colleges therefore must do their utmost to not exacerbate the economic crisis they hope to help the Government address. Colleges are significant employers and economic players in their own right, providing relatively secure employment to a broad range of occupational groups and anchoring much-needed purchasing power in many parts of Scotland. These institutions should be supported and encouraged to avoid redundancies, and to maintain fair wages and conditions, including defined benefit pensions. What is required here – as a contribution to economic recovery – is investment not cutbacks. Relationships with public sector clients should be strengthened (part-time, open learning, 'block' courses) Social care and early years education are obvious areas of expansion.

What must be avoided is seeing non teaching roles as 'easy hits' for savings. Our members work to support students -(in libraries, careers services, counselling, course administration) and to ensure a safe, effective and learning-conducive environment (in cleaning, campus security, IT operations catering and grounds departments) - these functions are integral to what currently works well. Most institutions enacted cuts programmes in the austerity years, and have been left with a legacy of short staffing, low morale and, in some cases, damaged service provision. There will be no easy cuts to make. Institutions must be careful not to compromise basic aspects of the student experience.

The Fraser of Allander's ringing endorsement of just 3 years ago, in our view, advocates paradigm shift promulgated in the [Cumberford -Little Report](#). Whilst business partnerships provide a vital input and a relatively small income stream ( to total income/expenditure, currently single digit percentage and concentrated in certain colleges) , a pivot to make this the main strategy - 'cornerstone' of future college development - with a particular emphasis on overseas markets, seems folly to UNISON in the post-COVID-19 decade of economic reshape and development.

Student experience can be enhanced by greater attention and support for delivery of a 'Charter of Rights' for students, who should have a passport of entitlements which they can expect to rely on and benefit from when they participate in life. This is particularly important in relation to building an inclusive social recovery. In the wake of the financial crisis the Scottish Government promised a positive destination for every school leaver. The responsibility for delivering this fell most acutely on the college sector, which was ill resourced to do so. The upshot was that This meant that many courses, and facilities – creches, out of hours library access etc most appropriate for or aimed at people looking to get back into education/ workforce (eg

returning mothers) were axed in favour of courses for school leavers. This should not be allowed to happen again.

*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.)*

- 1. Ignoring Fair Work and viewing Trade Unions as the enemy**
- 2. Personal Contracts and Senior Pay**
- 3. The SFC guidance on VS should be reviewed in partnership with trade unions.**
- 4. Outsourcing policy**

1. The FE sector should stop its negative attitude to Fair Work. The COVID pandemic and its aftermath should be the crossroads point at which there is a step change in the attitude to and implementation of the Fair Work Principles. Trade unions, on behalf of the workforce, should be embraced as partners in the objective of securing inclusive social and economic recovery. At national level, a Strategic tripartite Partnership Forum should be established between Employers, Government and trade unions. At local level (Regional and College) there should be established Local Partnership Forums which serve a separate purpose than existing JCCs/JNC. Their remit would be the strategic and financial direction of the institution(s). This would complement and support the Board (and Trade Union member in particular, from September 2020) and SMT to achieve the best possible decision-making support innovation, reform and implementation of change.

Investment in trade union facility time and ministerial endorsement to ensure that adequate time and resource is allocated to the structures and machinery (local and national) required to facilitate genuine and meaningful partnership working post COVID. Such arrangements would demonstrate real commitment to the Fair Work Agenda. This would free up meeting space, time and energy for mechanisms to progress the actual difficulties that are sure to beset us all in the coming months and years.

2. The Sector should stop basing the system of senior pay on personal contracts with bonus and fringe benefit provisions. All FE staff up to and including Principals should be brought under scope of the NJNC collective bargaining arrangements.

3. Colleges should stop using professional student support services as an easy target and staff as collateral damage to balance books. It should stop undertaking chaotic local service redesigns and restructures based on short termism. The sector

should stop relying on an reducing and ageing workforce to deliver quality services against the odds.

There should be a robust national Organisational Change Policy & Procedure and Redeployment policy; allied to reskilling and 'grow your own' training programmes to allow workforce planning to be strategic and balanced.

Local and regional service restructures should be based on quality of service and sound partnership business case processes. Not ad hoc and driven by the availability of (often disgruntled) workers who are willing to sell their jobs under inadequate Voluntary Severance schemes.

FE has seen a continued programme of cuts to front-line staffing since regionalisation of the college sector and it cannot sustain the approach we have seen hitherto on voluntary severance being applied without proper trade union engagement or underpinning service rationale. Nor should voluntary severance be the standard 'remedy' for poor financial planning/management. Our members in FE report increasing stress levels since the period of merger and we need to ensure that the search for savings through job cuts does not continue to create workload pressures, as this in itself, is costly to the sector in terms of service provision, staff morale and sick pay etc.

4. FE should stop the policy of outsourcing catering, cleaning and other estates services. This is important if institutions are to maximise their role as anchor institutions and responsible local partners, The pandemic has shown the contractual arrangements involved in outsourcing to be loaded in favour of the contractor who take all the profits and none of the risk.

As an example summer 2020 has seen redundancies ( by private contractors) in the three Glasgow Colleges. Since 2010 Clyde College had perpetuated in house catering at Cardonald (which remains) but contracted provision at Langside and Anniesland. There was more than sufficient time for a planned quality, efficient and effective in-house catering services not just for Clyde, but collaboratively across the three Glasgow Colleges. Instead of the shambles, and expense, of individual procurement processes.

Outsourcing introduces a two tier workforce and allows for profit based on worker exploitation to take place within the public education system.

Cleanliness is key to continued good public health. Nutrition and hydration is the key to good teaching and learning. The Scottish Government banned privatisation of cleaning and catering in NHS Scotland many years ago and quality of service, staff morale and retention has improved.

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

With only a handful of exceptions Scotland's colleges should not be making great efforts to attract international students. They will contribute to Scotland's international connectedness and competitiveness by enabling the country to develop a workforce with the skills and capacity to connect and compete on international level.

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

In FE cross – institution technological 'hubs' (and other centres of excellence) would be a welcome development and strengthening of the previous policy of Regionalisation. This may help address the digital poverty in Scotland exposed by the pandemic. CLD has a key role to play in this space and should be viewed as part of the total adult education system and resource.

This should not be taken as an endorsement of widespread structural change in college education as a response to crisis. A rush to further mergers and contractions needs to be avoided. A parliamentary analysis of the 2000 College Regionalisation has shown [a lack of evidence](#) in support of ill defined benefits from the new approach.

In recent years, UNISON has represented members across Scotland not only in college regionalization, but in health and social integration, centralisation of police and fire services, and many doomed or aborted 'shared services' initiatives between public service organisations.

Through that experience, we can say that collaboration at all levels is best achieved through respect, shared goals, strong and engaged leadership, and the strict avoidance of scenarios where people fear or distrust working together across organisations. Mergers, especially mergers incorporating job losses, service cuts and TUPE transfers, are a weak material basis for effective collaboration, and never deliver the sort of savings claimed when they are announced. Speculative structural change is an expensive and potentially wasteful luxury at a time when increasing education provision, jobs and services is becoming a more urgent economic priority. The mistakes of the past should not be repeated.

*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*

UNISON is reluctant to accept a narrative of scarce public resources. Not least because any scarcity results not from an absolute shortage of resources – but as a result of political decisions about what resources will be available. Decisions about priorities cannot be made until the economic impact of the crisis is clearly established and political decisions on 'who pays?' have been made. The austerity years in public services have seen an extravagant growth in the wealth of the richest

people in our society, and years of cuts have occurred in tandem with reduced taxes on corporations and wealthy individuals. We will always argue for the protection of public services, and the jobs and conditions of those who deliver those services. In that vein, we call on the SFC to guard against institutions rushing to cut staff, consequently compromising basic functions, and then damaging their future growth prospects.

*Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions*

Public bodies (Local Authorities; Health Boards and others) are major destinations for a large cohort of Further Education graduates (e.g. Social Care, Early Years). Strong partnerships with local public sector partners are frequently underplayed (eg in the Cumberland – Little report). Developing these will be vital in moving forward. Similarly exploring ways of enhancing and improving part-time access to college/ university provision for those in employment in public bodies is a necessary and potential growth area for which should be properly explored.

- *Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery*

Withdrawing Colleges from the ONS accounting classification (which they joined in 2014) would be a retrograde step, open the sector to greater internal competition and privatisation. It is inappropriate for a sector which is embedded in the public education system in Scotland. Some 'input' specification of college provision (student and staff numbers) should remain necessary co-ordinates in the system of funding and delivery. Reviewing the fundamental business model of colleges in the post COVID-19 economy would be a precarious voyage.

Performance management of local college systems and 'accountable governance' should be viewed as being just that, and not be characterised as as they were by Cumberland – Little as 'bureaucracy creep'.

- *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*

We would point to the report by the English Association of Colleges – [REBUILD: A Skills Led Recovery Plan](#) as an outline that can be usefully adapted for Scottish circumstances.

*What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment ?*

Our answer to this question is straightforward: we want to see support from the Scottish Government commensurate with the crisis at hand, and for the SFC to continue prioritise stability and development in the sector.

Teaching should be fully funded, with commercial income and where relevant international student income becoming a bonus, rather than providing cross-subsidy for basic activities.

We want to see a serious and defined application of Fair Work principles, in continuing dialogue with the sector trade unions, and we do not want to see the sector take steps that worsen the socio-economic crisis it hopes to remedy.

We want to see true recognition of the worth and contribution of professional and support services staff, and we will resist any new vision for the sector that positions these people as 'cuts to back office'.

Finally, we wish to see continuing engagement with the trade unions at a strategic level, and respect for trade unions' contribution as a legitimate social partner and voice of the workforce.

## **Higher Education**

In this review our priorities are:

- the job and income security of our members
- the serious, rigorous application of Fair Work standards, and meaningful adherence to the Scottish Government's desire for an inclusive social and economic recovery
- respect and recognition for the role of professional and support services staff within universities
- resistance to a narrative that cuts are necessary or inevitable, rather than politically determined
- where cuts occur, genuine equity in the application of cost-saving measures, given the deep disparities in earnings and benefits between our members and senior management grades
- that tertiary education plays its part in delivering a just recovery that shields the most vulnerable and produces a more equal Scotland with resilient, world-leading public services

*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?*

Scotland is blessed with a world class higher education system, with institutions renowned at home and worldwide for their teaching, advanced research and sustained contributions to economic and cultural life. The sector has kept this reputation and level of provision despite long years of flat funding settlements and competition from English universities flush with tuition fees cash. There has been an increasing reliance on international student fees, commercial income and partnerships beyond public funding for teaching, which has made the sector highly vulnerable to the risks and shocks following on from the virus crisis.

When the SFC and Scottish Government look to what currently works well, UNISON urges a holistic view that gives due recognition to the contribution of professional and support services staff.

Our members work to support students (in libraries, careers services, counselling, course administration) and to ensure a safe, effective and learning-conducive environment (in cleaning, campus security, IT operations catering and grounds departments) - these functions are integral to what currently works well and cannot be treated as easy sources of savings in a time of scarcity. Most universities have already enacted cuts programmes in the austerity years, with short staffing, low morale and damaged service provision in some areas. There will be no easy cuts to make, and Scottish universities must be careful not to compromise basic aspects of the student experience that will jeopardise future student recruitment in an increasingly cut-throat battle for UK and international market share.

When it comes to an inclusive social and economic recovery, universities must do their utmost to not exacerbate the economic crisis they hope to help the Government address. Universities are significant employers and economic players in their own right, providing relatively secure employment to a broad range of occupational groups and anchoring much-needed purchasing power in many parts of Scotland. These institutions should be supported and encouraged to avoid redundancies, and to maintain fair wages and conditions, including defined benefit pensions.

It is important to highlight the key role that specialist institutions play in driving economic growth, delivering highly skilled graduates and that this should be maintained. Scotland's creative industries contribute more than £5 billion to the Scottish economy every year, and the vital role SSI have in growing the creative industries should not be underestimated. The Scottish governments Economic strategy identifies creative industries as a growth sector where Scotland can build on existing advantages to increase employability, productivity and growth.

Given the perennial controversies around executive pay in the university sector, there can be no credibly inclusive recovery if catering assistants, library workers and



low-paid administrators are asked to pay for this crisis with their jobs, their pension rights or through outsourcing.

An approach that takes and takes from these working class members of university communities risks the credibility of the Scottish Government's overarching commitments to inclusive recovery and fair work standards.

*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.)*

UNISON wishes to see an end to lavish executive pay and perks for senior managers in the university sector, particularly where there are threats of job losses or attacks on basic terms and conditions. The grace and favour homes, chauffeur-driven cars and club memberships are ultimately damaging for the sector's reputation with the wider public, and are basically offensive to our members working for meagre wages in support services roles, who are set to face their third, poor, imposed pay offer in a row. We want to see a new deal on pay and job security in the Scottish sector, compressing senior management pay to avoid compulsory redundancies, eliminate outsourcing, address the gender and ethnic pay gaps, and ensure fair pay for those towards the bottom of the pay scale.

On widening access, UNISON believes the way the university sector treats its lowest paid staff matters - universities should be acutely aware of how they are viewed and discussed in poor and working class communities, and how that shapes the perceptions of prospective students. If the sons and daughters of university porters, caterers and security officers see their loved ones treated shabbily, especially in comparison with the highest paid, they will draw their own conclusions about institutions' true regard for 'people like me'.

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

The key point UNISON wishes to emphasise here is international perception of the safety and 'covid security' of university campuses.

The Minister, the Scottish Government's trade envoy and various sector leaders have emphasised the importance of marketing Scottish universities as a safe place to come for your education.

That safety and security, and the credibility of such marketing, must be based on properly resourced, in-house cleaning and campus operations regimes. UNISON

members in these areas are rarely considered of any strategic importance, but the success of their work is going to be integral to Scottish higher education's connectedness and competitiveness in a world where the virus colours all decisions and actions. This true importance of this work should be recognised with investment, respect and inclusion of the workers' views on effective service provision.

*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?*

While it's difficult to be sure at this stage how severe the real, enduring impact will be, a world with firmer borders, less confident travel and less willingness to move for work and study will have a significant impact on Scottish Higher Education. We will also likely face those challenges in the context of an international economic crisis beyond the depth and scale of 2008/9.

There is the obvious risk to international student recruitment income and associated losses on accommodation, but also a risk of less knowledge exchange with fewer academics and researchers choosing to make their home in the Scottish sector. There is a possibility of skills shortages in the HE workforce, requiring more intensive 'grow our own' training and development programmes in-house. There is the risk, particularly with a Conservative government setting the overall 'tax and spend' parameters, that we will quickly return to extremely damaging, self-defeating austerity measures that can only be mitigated by the devolved administration.

While it's not necessarily an 'opportunity', there is a clear role for HE where the Scottish Government is forced to build a more independent, resilient country less reliant on imports of people, products and services to sustain basic functions.

In research, education, training and modelling new institutional responses to crisis, Scottish tertiary education can pioneer the answers to the interlocking crises of our times. UNISON must again stress that the entire workforce is needed to carry out that work effectively.

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

In recent years, UNISON has represented members across Scotland in the processes of health and social integration, college regionalisation, centralisation of police and fire services, and many doomed or aborted 'shared services' initiatives between public service organisations.

Through that experience, we can say that collaboration at all levels is best achieved through respect, shared goals, strong and engaged leadership, and the strict avoidance of scenarios where people fear or distrust working together across organisations.

Mergers, especially mergers incorporating job losses, service cuts and TUPE transfers, are a weak material basis for effective collaboration.

UNISON has already made clear in writing its opposition to the Cumberland-Little report: speculative structural change is an expensive and potentially wasteful luxury at a time when education provision, jobs and services must be protected as far as possible.

*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*

UNISON is reluctant to accept a narrative of scarce resources until the economic impact of the crisis is clearly established and political decisions on 'who pays?' have been made. The austerity years in public services have seen an extravagant growth in the wealth of the richest people in our society, and years of cuts have occurred in tandem with reduced taxes on corporations and wealthy individuals.

We will always argue for the protection of public services, and the jobs and conditions of those who deliver those services. In that vein, we call on the SFC to guard against institutions rushing to cut staff, consequently compromising basic functions, and then damaging their future growth prospects. We also urge the SFC to do much more to push 'Fair Work' into substantive changes in institutions' treatment of workforces. We are not content with the universities' reflex definition of Fair Work as 'what we already do'. The SFC should not encourage universities to contribute to a deeper crisis of unemployment / demand in the Scottish economy.

- *Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions*

UNISON would like to see a greater level of analysis of the socio-economic footprint of the sector, and particular institutions within that sector. We are sure Scottish Government agencies have the analytical capacity to develop and share this information, and such detailed socio-economic assessments should be performed in a transparent manner when assessing potential cuts, mergers or structural changes to the sector.

- *Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery*

We would request the inclusion of defined Fair Work milestones in accountability frameworks, so institutions understand these expectations are serious, embedded

and carry political support. In terms of collaborative action, we must again distinguish true collaboration from forced mergers and cuts-driven structural change. We would hope to see the Ministerial Leadership Group become a permanent body, embedding coordination across sectors and stakeholders for the long term.

- *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*

See comments above in Higher education section of this response on treatment of working-class members of staff, and the risk to perception of universities in target communities for wide access.

- *What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment*

UNISON's answer to this question is relatively straightforward: we want to see support from the Scottish Government commensurate with the crisis at hand, and for the SFC to continue prioritising stability in the sector.

We want to see university teaching fully funded, with commercial income and international student income becoming a bonus, rather than providing cross-subsidy for basic activities.

We want to see a serious and defined application of Fair Work principles, in continuing dialogue with the sector trade unions, and we do not want to see the sector take steps that worsen the socio-economic crisis it hopes to remedy.

We want to see true recognition of the worth and contribution of professional and support services staff, and we will resist any new vision for the sector that positions these people as 'cuts to back office'.

Finally, we wish to see continuing engagement with the trade unions at a strategic level, and respect for trade unions' contribution as a legitimate social partner and voice of the workforce.

**UNISON Scotland**

**Aug 2020**

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