

SFC REVIEW: CALL FOR EVIDENCE-

UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE

- 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?**

What Works Well

In our view there is much to admire about Scottish higher education, and there is great concern that major change could destabilise the sector, risk its international reputation and reduce its powerful contribution to the Scottish economy, science, culture and society, particularly in times of great uncertainty not just due to the pandemic but also the looming final chapter in Brexit (with or without a deal).

The international standing of Scottish HE Institutions, as evidenced by the reputation of Scottish degrees, performance in league tables, and performance in research and innovation, is beyond that which would be expected from a nation of our size and globally respected.

The sector makes a significant contribution to the local and national economies, with a [report from 2016](#) indicating that at that time the University of Dundee contributed over £740 million p/a (and supports 8,000 jobs) to the Scottish economy. An estimated 1 in 12 Dundee jobs were supported by University of Dundee's activity and student spending was estimated to support 1587 jobs in Scotland¹. For every £1 in Scottish Government funding in 2016 the University of Dundee generated £7 to the Scottish Economy.²

Our role in bringing the V&A to Dundee, in health partnerships with NHS Tayside and in the Tay Cities Deal Partnership is evidence of our commitment to activities that benefit the region and our nation. Our economic impact of course, is not just local but also global, and we have consistently demonstrated our commitment to educating and training the workforce of tomorrow from wherever they hail, be it through our championing of the Graduate Apprenticeship scheme, our focus on widening access, the use of blended learning to take Dundee to the world, or our involvement in reskilling the existing workforce.

Further to this, Scottish HEI's are recognized for offering an exceptional student experience. Our rankings in the NSS tables prove we have the highest student approval rates in the whole of the UK. Overall, 85% of students who responded to the survey were satisfied with their course, with strong scores in each of the metrics. For overall satisfaction, in 2020 seven

¹ <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/media/dundeewebsite/main/news/Economic-and-Social-Impact-Study-Brochure.pdf>

² <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/media/dundeewebsite/main/news/Economic-and-Social-Impact-Study-Brochure.pdf>

Scottish providers were in the Top 20, nine in the top 25 and ten in the top 30 — the University of Dundee is ranked 11th in the UK and 4th in Scotland. In addition to this, the University was also given a Gold Award in the 2017 UK wide Teaching Excellence Framework.

All this has been achieved despite a well-documented chronic underfunding of both the teaching of home students and research activities. SFC funding to the sector has decreased in real terms by 7% over the 3-year period from 2014/15- 2017/18, meaning that tuition fees from unregulated students have now become the single largest source of income for the sector, overtaking SFC grants, evidenced by Audit Scotland's review of Scottish HE³. Furthermore, Home student fees do not sufficiently cover the full economic cost of teaching, meaning that the sector is heavily dependent on international student fees to recoup losses and subsidise the cost of teaching of home students. Despite growing income from non-EU students by +33% over the same three-year period to subsidise the lack of government funding, the University of Dundee is still operating with a deficit budget.

It is our view that the current imbalance in student funding has created a dependency on international recruitment for core funding, and that this presents a significant risk to the sector. Students from outside the EU now account for 23% of enrolments (and a much higher percentage of fees) compared to 20% of the rest of the UK. The reality of the high reliance on international students for fee income is that the funding system is no longer financially sustainable in its current form. In the post-EU, post-pandemic environment, competition is expected to become fiercer and opportunities slimmer, and it is worth noting that a 10% loss in international income in Scotland equates to around a £85 million⁴ gap and following the aftermath of Brexit and Covid-19 it is conceivable that recruitment figures and associated income may be much lower.

Each year over 8,000 international students from 180 countries study in Scotland, and over the last 5 years the international student population has grown by 25%. In the 2018 Universities Scotland [response to the Migration Advisory Committee Call for Evidence on International Students](#), non-EU tuition fees were estimated to account for £438m and these students were estimated to contribute around £500m to the Scottish Economy. As such while reliance on international income has created a challenging environment for HE institutions, the sector's entrepreneurial behaviour in this space has become a significant 'export' for Scotland.

Similarly, while Scottish HEIs outperform the rest of the UK in terms of winning competitive grant funding, the level of the SFC REG grant under the dual support system is insufficient to cover the gap between grant funding and the true cost of research. Only 80.1% of FEC of research activity was recovered over the three-year period making it a financially loss-making activity despite its contributions to reputation, knowledge-base and the economy.

The performance and reputation of Scottish HEIs is based upon a structure and foundation which prioritises high quality and a strong culture of innovation and enterprise. The University of Dundee's contributions to the pharmaceutical and biotech industry through innovative partnerships such as the DSTT and Drug Discovery Unit are clear examples of this.

³ https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2016/nr_160707_higher_education.pdf

⁴ <https://fraserofallander.org/scottish-economy/covid-19-impact-on-scottish-universities/>

In fact, it is well known that Scottish HEIs have established themselves as a partner of choice, and that they are well positioned post Covid-19 and post-Brexit to contribute to the Scottish economy.

The University of Dundee is among many other higher education institutions that have been advancing research into the fight against the current pandemic. Examples of this include the recently launched national study into the long-term impacts of Covid-19 which was awarded £8.4 million jointly by UKRI and NIHR. Another example illustrating our international competitiveness is the €5 million award to the Drug Discovery Unit (DDU) from the Covid-19 Therapeutics Accelerator, initiated by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This will enable our DDU scientists to develop antiviral treatments from Covid-19 and future coronaviruses. It is such work that emphasizes the value and need to preserve the sustainability of higher education institutions in what can be considered uncertain times.

Preservation of prized features

This review will find that the sector is working well for Scotland and will continue to work well for Scotland. The positive features of the Scottish HE sector outlined above should be preserved in order to secure Scotland's inclusive social and economic recovery from the current pandemic. However, it will also find that the basic economies of Scottish HEIs are at risk due to structural funding deficits and that the government has a vital role in the years ahead to address the threat of financial instability across the sector.

The sector has proved itself to be able to adapt to the changing requirements of individuals and the economy. In this respect the autonomy and uniqueness of individual institutions is key to their agility in responding to change and we recommend that future funding initiatives and associated regulations should recognise the strengths and variations between institutions.

- 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.)**

The University of Dundee has been at the heart of the social and economic recovery of Dundee for over 20 years and sees itself continuing in this role in the post-Covid-19 recovery. Our University Strategy to 2022 set out our core purpose as 'to transform lives, locally and globally through the creation, sharing and application of knowledge'. The University will continue to pursue the prioritisation of its activities within this context.

We would encourage the Scottish Government to consider the bureaucratic burden on Universities from regulations and information requests at a time when the sector needs to be at its most agile.

Widening Access

The Scottish Government analysis has predicted that the impact of the recession will be felt unequally hard by women, young people, the disabled, the socio-economically disadvantaged, and people from some minority ethnic backgrounds.

Within the University's vision, the importance of social inclusion has remained a high priority focus and will continue to be. We successfully lead the way in widening access agenda⁵ with an exceptional record and a long-standing commitment to ensuring access for all into higher education. The University of Dundee alone has accounted for over 30% of the national increase in students pursuing higher education from backgrounds in the most deprived 40%⁶. Alongside achievements in widening access, the University of Dundee also holds a positive record for graduate employability – with the most recent data showing that 96.2% of Dundee graduates were in work or further study six months after graduation. This remains a high priority area for us and we aspire to do more in these areas.

We believe that we can position ourselves as a 'flagship' model of inclusiveness, beginning with thoughtful curriculum design to create an inclusive curriculum that will further increase the underrepresentation of the student body in particular areas.

Research and Innovation

With respect to research, innovation and knowledge exchange, as referenced in section (a), the Scottish Sector out-performs the rest of the UK, per head of population, in terms of winning research grant funding which points to the sectors level of efficiency in the way it applies the available funding. The role of research activity in economic growth cannot be overstated – for example, spin offs and start-ups from the University of Dundee contribute a further 1160 jobs and over £230 million to the Scottish economy. In order for institutions to continue to contribute substantially to the economy it is vital that they are provided with the adequate level of support with regards to funding.

Our strengths in life sciences, health and well-being, engineering, forensic science and the environment provide a basis for our contribution to recovery. However, we believe that the current funding models constrain universities from greater differentiation in their offerings and that there is room for innovative thinking by autonomous institutions working collaboratively. There is also scope for accelerating the translation of research into products and practices, and we would site our proposed Tay Cities Deal 'Growing the Biomedical Cluster' incubation space as one example of how this could be achieved.

Similarly, we are endeavouring to support the drive for 'Net Zero', with an important new collaboration signalled through the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc in Dundee. In this project we will be working across a range of innovation projects in low carbon engineering, transport and in the policy and training domains of creating a world-class centre for sustainable mobility.

Articulation

⁵ <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/study/widening-access/>

⁶ <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/media/dundeewebsite/main/news/Economic-and-Social-Impact-Study-Brochure.pdf>

Whilst Scottish Universities are recognized for offering high quality degree programmes, the pathways that lead students into HE from further education colleges could be better streamlined as to avoid unnecessary overlap in education provision and provide better value for money. The Scottish Government paper 'Putting Learners at the Centre: Developing our Ambition for post-16 Education' emphasizes the need to better link the learning systems of schools, colleges and universities to enable "an enormously powerful force in delivering the capability that employers and the economy needs⁷". Whilst there is positive collaboration between FE and HE, we believe that more can be done.

Outcome Agreements

The way in which the Outcome Agreement process has been operated by the SFC has created an environment where every institution feels expected to contribute to every priority set out by Scottish Government and SFC. This makes it very difficult to identify specifics that could be stopped as institutions are assessed against these many priorities. Despite a very strong alignment of our outcome agreement to the government's agenda (for example in relation to wider access performance), and excellent feedback on it from the SFC, we have seen little or no positive reward, with Dundee over recent years consistently receiving some of the lowest annual percentage increases in total SFC funding in the sector. The success of the Scottish Sector is underpinned by its diversity and we suggest that it would be better for the Scottish Government and SFC to assess the progress of the sector towards the priorities rather than individual institutions. Such an approach would also reduce the current bureaucratic burden.

Digital Technology

The Coronavirus pandemic has shown the critical importance of digital technologies, data and processes for the effective operation of higher education. We urge the Scottish Government and SFC to commit appropriate funds to support the development of leading-edge digital approaches to teaching, research and administration.

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

Universities are already highly networked to enable them to take advantage of funding opportunities within the international landscape. Scotland benefits from the strong international reputation of its HE sector, which attracts international research leaders and students to the country and exports both skills and knowledge on a global scale. We would highlight partnership in China, the training of nurses in Eritrea, and diabetes collaborations in Kuwait as examples of our global presence. These activities generate reputation, funding and soft power for Scotland across the world.

To survive in the post-Covid-19 environment we need to have a balance of competitiveness with connectedness. The University of Dundee is already linked into the Scottish

⁷ Scottish Government (2011), Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering our Ambitions for post-16 Education

Government agenda to promote and represent Scotland's export interests and champion international trading, with our VP (International) serving as a Scot Gov Trade envoy seeking to identify specific business opportunities where there is currently untapped potential. The Scottish Government could however, assist with our international recruitment effort through targeted marketing and welcoming information that supports the whole sector.

Unfortunately, Scotland is absent from many research concordat and research innovation catapults within the EU. Addressing this as a matter of urgency would greatly assist the sector. There will be opportunities for Scottish institutions in the post Brexit environment, not least in terms of global partnerships. Universities UK and the EU higher education organisations have already expressed commitment to planning a strong future together post-Brexit⁸ which can be further capitalized on by the fact that Scottish HEIs are held in positive regard within the EU giving us a unique vantage point to advance our collaborations and reputation. To accomplish this, immediate government support will be essential.

Further to this, the UK Government's roadmap to research and development provides a strong framework to invigorate research activity and partnerships across the UK. Again, ensuring that Scotland has a strong role within this will be vital. As outlined in the consultation, the UK Government intends to invest £22 billion into R&D annually, whilst setting out a strategy that best supports this investment. The document includes references to changing research funding, research culture and infrastructure- which are all extremely welcomed in the current research environment. Scottish HE is well placed but will require both the SFC and Scottish Government to support this activity. In addition, at the core of the document are principles of co-operation, partnership and connectedness which will ultimately help Scotland (and the rest of the UK) to increase our international standing. It is therefore critical, as the SFC has a central role in the Dual Funding model of research, that the SFC recognize the potential in the UK Government's new strategy and identify ways, including through targeted funding, in which they can best support this initiative so that Scottish Universities can remain a viable and reputable partner of choice Internationally.

With regards to international relationships outside the research space, it is worth mentioning the value of the Erasmus scheme⁹ and its success thus far. Whilst the Erasmus scheme has been extremely successful in creating opportunities for students and the subsequent University partnerships that have been established, it has traditionally been difficult to encourage Scottish students to enter into exchanges beyond English speaking countries, thus limiting potential global partnerships. The new iteration of the programme, due next year, provides an opportunity to discover ways in which the University and the programme can work together to mobilize Scottish students to enter into exchanges more widely and firmly establish Scotland as a partner of choice and friend of Europe. It is important that Universities, SFC and Erasmus fully engage in the consultation process, especially in light of uncertainty around Brexit, to achieve the optimum outcome and enhance the Sector's international standing.

⁸ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/news/Pages/EU-and-UK-research-and-higher-education-organisations-plan-a-strong-future-relationship-post-Brexit.aspx>

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en

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?

The post-pandemic environment presents obvious, far-reaching challenges and implications for the viability of higher education institutions which has been well documented in the sector's contributions to the SFC Briefing Note on the financial impacts of Covid-19. One of the most marked impacts is the potential loss of income from international student fees (as discussed in section c) which ultimately threatens the financial sustainability of most universities across the UK, but especially in Scotland where the chronic underfunding of home student tuition below FEC is most pronounced. Further to this, challenges exist surrounding the resource and cost required to repurpose the curriculum to blended learning due to the pandemic which is likely to have consequential effect on student experience and University reputation. It is also important to consider the impact of Covid-19 on the social and cultural aspects of working and studying within Universities – with remote working, although presenting new opportunities, also creating challenges for members of University staff and students. The social and cultural impact of universities on the communities in which they are embedded are fundamental and must be considered alongside those related to their economic impact.

The University of Dundee has been incredibly responsive to these challenges, with a number of Covid-19 sub-groups established to consider each of these potential threats. These have not only worked to mitigate successfully the impacts of Covid-19 but have taken this unique opportunity to reimagine the University's future. Whilst the potentially severe impact of the global pandemic must be addressed, in tandem, opportunities must be taken to reinvent and rejuvenate aspects of higher education which would have been more difficult to change under different circumstances. The review should note the tremendous success of the sector in adapting quickly to the pandemic in both Teaching and Research.

The transition to blended learning, whilst bearing additional costs, presents an opportunity for education providers to reinvent the curriculum and reflect on important aspects of curriculum design. Furthermore, the consequences of the pandemic have ignited discussions around flexible working and the ways in which we manage space to create a new dynamic work culture that will be suited for all and may have a positive benefit for staff from disadvantaged backgrounds, or with protected characteristics.

Lastly, the fight against the pandemic has presented new opportunities for Scottish HE institutions to showcase our research talents. The University of Dundee Drug Discovery Unit recently received an award of £225k in partnership with the University of Glasgow's Centre for Virus Research to screen for Covid-19 treatments. The University of Dundee has world class researchers in the life sciences, medicine and [dentistry](#) who are doing fundamental and applied research into coronaviruses and their medical, economic, social and policy impacts. Further core funding will allow this work to proceed at scale and at speed, with attendant benefits to the whole of Scotland. Indeed, our work in developing recommendations for re-opening dental services, led by academics from the Universities of Dundee and Aberdeen, has been praised by the World Health Organisation and Scottish Government.

Whilst the impact of the pandemic has undoubtedly forced universities to reevaluate their priorities, out of every crisis lies an opportunity. The University of Dundee is well positioned to realise some of these opportunities as we adapt and grow. However, support from the SFC would be strongly welcomed so that we can remain one of Scotland's leading Universities and contribute fully to the Scottish HE system.

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

Scottish HEIs have a strong history of collaboration and partnership, for example the Scottish Higher Education Employability Forum (SHEEF)¹⁰ was developed to promote, support and enhance the strategic development and integration of employability principles across the Scottish higher education sector. SHEEF was managed through a series of collaborative partnerships between the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), QAA Scotland (QAA), Universities Scotland (US), LTW2 student placement programmes, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) and NUS Scotland. The SHEEF initiative has made considerable progress since its beginnings and is a testament to Scottish HE's appetite and commitment for valuable partnership.

Collaboration within Scottish research is also well established with research pooling increasing the impact of research themes through the building of critical mass and sharing of knowledge. The international nature of individual research collaborations is also at the heart of research excellence at the University. We would encourage the review to recognise the importance of government support for collaborations being based on the individual strengths, contributions and missions of institutions enabling them to offer more to themes where they have strengths. In this way regional or specialist collaborations could be pursued more beneficially.

Even during a global pandemic, Scottish HEIs have shown their commitment to working together to face the unique threats posed by the impact of Covid-19. Universities Scotland, the Scottish Government and Colleges Scotland have co-ordinated their response in a way that unifies the education sector and maintains a cohesive strategic approach. For example, Scottish Universities and Colleges, in line with government recommendations, have remained broadly consistent regarding delays to the start of term in preparing for a phased return and have worked tirelessly to ensure the health and safety of students and staff is protected. Universities Scotland's new website landing page for Coronavirus information, with the newly created hashtag '#WeAreTogether'¹¹, brilliantly captures the essence of Scottish Universities and the collaborative approach we have taken in responding to the pressures of the on-going situation.

As highlighted previously, the sector would strongly benefit from enhanced collaboration between further education and higher education that is adequately supported by the SFC. The University of Dundee has well-established partnerships with our local FE colleges and

¹⁰ learning-to-work-together-the-challenge-of-collaborative-arrangements-for-strategic.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/covid-19/>

has validated degrees for FE colleges in Scotland and internationally. Our collaboration with Oxford International College launched the highly successful International College Dundee (ICD) in 2017¹². The success story of our ICD in providing pathways for international students into fully accredited degrees programmes can inspire future collaborations between FE and HE to achieve shared goals such as the widening access agenda.

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**

As a sector we have many achievements to be proud of; our exceptional student experience, the quality of our education provision, the influence and strength of our research and innovation and more generally, our culture characterized by bold ambition and principles of inclusion. This is underpinned by institutional autonomy which has created a rich and diverse sector, that can contribute in a wide number of ways to Scotland's success. The SFC system contributes to the Scottish education system in substantial ways and the importance of such a body in creating one of the most highly educated countries in the world must be acknowledged.

The Dual Funding Model

However, there are certain aspects of the SFC framework that could be developed or revised to further enhance our reputation and achievements. As highlighted from the outset, the funding model does not cover the full economic cost of either teaching or research. By forcing universities to focus on recovering this gap in funding, we are limiting them in developing their research and teaching capabilities and forcing them to rely on international student fees at levels that may be unsustainable in the future to subsidise what is lost and try to balance the books. Ultimately the funding shortage could be said to limit the ability of Universities to contribute more to Scotland's success and Scotland's economy.

¹² <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/international-college-dundee/>

In many ways, the Covid-19 crisis could be said to have ‘brought home to roost’ the Scottish Government’s failure to meet the true cost of educating Scottish students. While a policy of free tuition is a perfectly legitimate and democratic political decision, the subsequent failure to properly fund that policy means that Scottish student places are capped (thus reducing the opportunities for young people to go to university) and institutions lose money on every student they teach.

Research Councils and charities provide only up to 80% of the cost of research activity with government funding failing to meet its obligation under the dual funding model to deliver full economic costs for research. This has forced many universities to seek other, far less sustainable, sources of income (e.g. non-UK students, budget saving measures) which are now at even higher risk due to the impact of Covid-19. Whilst the model claims to “uphold the principles of the dual support system to retain confidence in the Scottish university research base¹³” the fact that the University of Dundee faces the prospects of limiting a portion of its research activity to mitigate operating at a loss suggests that the current funding model is not achieving its aims.

The SFC’s approach to allocating funding from REF2014 saw research at the highest levels of excellence less rewarded in Scotland than south of the border. This approach was inconsistent with the SFC’s stated mission “that Scotland will be the best place in the world to learn, educate, research and innovate” and, for example, led to Life Sciences at Dundee (which rose to be ranked top university for Life Sciences in the UK) receiving a significant drop in funding. The SFC should therefore consider all aspects of the funding model and contributions to ensure the viability of research in Scottish HEIs, particularly at the highest levels of world class excellence. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic, has left many institutions without the capacity to invest in change initiatives which could improve their efficiency, effectiveness, or establish new collaborations due to the up-front cost and we would welcome consideration of how these initiatives could be supported.

Performance Measures

As stated earlier, the Outcome Agreement process does not effectively incentivize Universities to perform under the current framework, as Outcome Agreements are negotiated between the SFC and individual universities and, as our experience has shown, seem to have no impact on funding. There is no reward for success or alignment to Scottish Government priorities evident in this model. Worse still, some funding streams reward those institutions that are performing less well in some areas under the guise of building capacity, whereas institutions who are doing well struggle to maintain this due to a lack of funding. For example, the University of Dundee consistently outperforms others in areas such as widening access and retention, however other institutions are receiving funding to address (reward) their poorer performance. Dundee over recent years has consistently received some of the lowest annual percentage increases in total SFC funding in the sector. It therefore feels like our institution

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consequently being disadvantaged in terms of funding despite successfully meeting outcome agreement objectives.

It is worth noting that where the Scottish Government and SFC have made additional funding available, the sector has been successful in delivering positive outcomes. Recent examples include the Global Challenges Research Fund, the additional Widening Access Places and the Upskilling fund and Graduate Apprenticeships. The latter is funded through the European Social Fund and it is important to think about how this will be funded once Scotland no longer has access to this fund. As noted above, the sector is already chronically underfunded and should not be expected to absorb this activity without the required funding.

In relation to performance measures, we suggest the Scottish Government and SFC consider measuring outcomes at a sector level rather than at an institution level, as ultimately institutions will contribute in different ways to Scotland's success. This diversity underpins the success of the Scottish Sector and is itself a form of strength and resilience within the sector that we should both recognise and celebrate. Outcome agreements push every institution to contribute to every priority, but this consequently spreads funding very thin and, taking into account the fixed costs associated with activity in each institution, this makes this an unnecessarily expensive approach. Appreciating the richness and diversity within the sector through a revised framework, we argue, would allow for greater overall success for the sector. However, the performance of individual institutions against key SFC and government priorities *in the context of their mission and capacity to contribute* needs to be measured and rewarded and there needs to be consequences for failure to meet these targets.

With regards to progress towards the green agenda and promoting economic recovery, the University of Dundee is contributing significantly to both. For example, the University is a founding partner of the newly constructed V&A built in the heart of Dundee which has created over 370 jobs and contributed an estimated £75 million to the Scottish economy¹⁴. Furthermore, in line with our environmentally conscious agenda and looking to greater potential economic impact, the University is currently engaging with the Eden Project, an educational charity which connects people with the living word to build a better future, on a feasibility study which considers expanding Eden Project operations to Dundee.

Supporting Sustainability and the Green Agenda

We however wish to highlight further inconsistency in the approach used to fund institutions in this agenda. The University of Dundee has consistently managed to fund green initiatives within its own funding envelope. This includes taking a leading position in Scotland on developing its own heat and power generation, through the installation of Combined Heat and Power Units over 20 years ago. We have managed this important contribution to lowering our carbon footprint over this period and have recently self-funded the replacement and upgrading of these units to ensure that we are maximising

¹⁴ <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/news/75m-economic-impact-of-va-dundee-revealed>

the impact of newer technologies. This includes innovative approaches to heat transfer to address cooling requirements in our Life Sciences complex. As these were renewal and upgrading of an existing infrastructure, these were not deemed eligible for funding despite their importance to lowering carbon emissions in Dundee and Tayside. However, funding was made available for new projects to others in the sector, despite the impact being comparable.

The Tay Cities deal¹⁵ also provides an opportunity for the University to expand its role in economic growth in our region, acting as a connector with local economies and enhancing global collaboration. Government support to get this over the starting line would be greatly appreciated. The creation of our “Biomedical Clusters” is estimated to produce between £3.9 - £11.6 million in increased student earnings, whilst the creation of our Forensic Sciences catapult centre “Just Tech” is forecast to create over 500 jobs in the next ten years. Whilst these projects will bring great success to the University of Dundee and all those involved, the SFC should consider how it can invest in these projects to create a joint response to economic recovery and sector growth. The role of SFC to support existing projects and those on the horizon will be crucial to achieving a fully inclusive, green and education-led recovery.

Communication and Guidance

Lastly, issues of funding, frameworks and sustainability set aside, an important way that the SFC could strengthen the Scottish HE sector is through strong communication and guidance moving forward in the post-pandemic and post-Brexit environment. Times are understandably going to be tough in the coming years, with increasing deficits, increased requirement for resource and growing global uncertainty, however it is crucial that the SFC, Universities and Scottish Government are able to work together to strike the right balance between partnership, accountability and support to create the most prosperous outcomes for Scottish Institutions moving forward. In this respect, we encourage the review to consider the capacity of the SFC to truly understand the sector and the challenges of running an institution in the modern-day environment as this would contribute to the effectiveness of the SFC as an organisation.

¹⁵ <https://www.dundee.ac.uk/tay-cities-deal/>