

The 122nd meeting of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council was held on Thursday 24 September 2020 at 10.00am, by video-conferencing.

Present: Mike Cantlay (Chair)  
Karen Watt (Chief Executive)  
Douglas Mundie (Deputy Chair)  
Sheila Duncan  
Lorna Jack  
Professor Ewart Keep  
Andy Kerr  
Dr Paul Little  
Professor Peter Mathieson  
Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam  
Caroline Stuart  
Professor John Wallace  
Professor Lesley Yellowlees

Scottish  
Government: Dr Linda Pooley

Observers: Andrew Youngson (union-nominated observer)  
Matt Crilly (President of NUS (Scotland))  
Cliona O'Neill (HEFCW)

Officers: Martin Boyle  
Martin Fairbairn (Secretary)  
Dr Stuart Fancey  
Lorna MacDonald  
Angela Seymour (Clerk)

Apologies: David Alexander  
Mhairi Harrington  
Dr Veena O'Halloran

**20/70 Welcome**

The Chair welcomed Cliona O'Neill from HEFCCW and all present.

**20/71 Chair's business: declarations of interest**

The Chair reminded Council board members of their responsibility to indicate if they had, or may be perceived to have, a conflict of interest under any item.

The following members noted a potential conflict of interest:

- Douglas Mundie in relation to the University of St Andrews and the Institute of Directors.
- Professor Ewart Keep in relation to his role as an Associate Fellow of the Scottish Centre for Employment Research, University of Strathclyde.
- Andy Kerr in relation to South Lanarkshire College and New College Lanarkshire.
- Dr Paul Little in relation to City of Glasgow College, Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and co-author of the Cumberland/ Little Report
- Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam in relation to Glasgow School of Art.
- Professor Peter Mathieson in relation to the University of Edinburgh.
- Professor John Wallace in relation to University of St Andrews
- Professor Lesley Yellowlees in relation to Edinburgh Napier University.
- Caroline Stuart in relation to Dumfries and Galloway College.

**20/72 Minute of the 20 August 2020 meeting (SFC/20/Min05)**

It was agreed to insert the following at item 20/51 (declarations of interest) in the minute of the 20 August 2020 meeting:

- Dr Paul Little in relation to City of Glasgow College, Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and co-author of the Cumberland/ Little Report

With that addition, the minute of the 20 August 2020 was **confirmed** as a true record of the meeting

## **20/73 Chief Executive's Report (SFC/20/46)**

The Council received a paper providing a report from the Chief Executive on current operational issues and proposing how additional funding of £10.15M from BEIS should be applied.

The following members noted a potential direct conflict of interest in relation to the proposed funding allocation:

- Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam in relation to Glasgow School of Art.
- Professor Peter Mathieson in relation to the University of Edinburgh.
- Professor Lesley Yellowlees in relation to Edinburgh Napier University.

In discussion the Council:

- Recognised that the increasing number of students testing positive for COVID -19, whilst contracted residentially rather than on campus , endangered the continuation of blended learning, but noted that further measures to mitigate were being implemented.
- Commented on the hidden costs of dealing with the pandemic.
- Noted the challenge in striking the right balance between the general public policy response to COVID-19 and the significant issues relating to student mental health, learning, social mobility and inclusion.
- Welcomed the general move across funders and regulators to reduce unnecessary reporting requirements on institutions, while noting that SFC's requirements are not as significant as those of other organisations.
- Welcome the additional funding made available by BEIS.

The Council **agreed** :

- the allocation of £10.15M from BEIS as a proportional uplift to SFC's existing Higher Education Research Capital Grant allocations in FY2020-21; and
- to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to finalise the allocations and reporting requirements

## **20/74 Review of coherent provision and sustainability**

The Council received a presentation setting out the progress and framing the next steps for the Review of coherent provision and sustainability.

The following members noted specific conflicts of interest regarding the proposed recommendations concerning Regional Strategic Bodies and the observations on the classification of incorporated colleges:

- Andy Kerr in relation to South Lanarkshire College and New College Lanarkshire.
- Dr Paul Little in relation to City of Glasgow College and the Glasgow Colleges' Regional Board.

The Council highly commended the work of the officers and the progress being made and covered the following matters in discussion:

- The proposed key messages and recommendations represent a blueprint for the right type of change needed to secure the future success of Scottish tertiary education.
- The importance of the evidence base which has been assembled, in the form of both the responses to the call for evidence and from the supporting reports and analyses.
- The value of the input which has been sought and provided by stakeholders, and that this should continue in the subsequent phases.
- The Council was encouraged by the interaction with employers and the proposals for collaboration between the economic and education sectors.
- The need to think very carefully about the choice of words used in key sections so that they communicate clearly our intention and minimise the risk of misinterpretation.
- If there is a genuine ambition to create a more integrated tertiary system, that will impact on all aspects of SFC's policies and functions so as to deliver better and more equal opportunities for students.
- Supported incorporation of the themes of inclusion and diversity as key threads in the sections on outcomes and governance, including the importance of student mental health.
- Noted the important references to preparing people for the world of work and of the key roles for colleges and universities in supporting place-based objectives.

- That digital poverty will need to be addressed as more use is made of online and blended learning approaches, as will capital and IT investment requirements.
- The review should not just change the work of SFC, but should have an impact on the whole education system.
- Scarcity of funding to support investment in new initiatives could be a significant constraint.

The Council **endorsed** the key themes and proposals as set out in the presentation and agreed to consider the proposals regarding the Regional Strategic Bodies and the observations on the classification of incorporated colleges following actions to manage conflicts of interest.

Andy Kerr and Dr Paul Little temporarily left the meeting.

In further discussion the Council noted the following:

- That both classification of incorporated colleges and the multi-college region structures are complex issues which need careful consideration.
- Both have been therefore been positioned as advice to the Scottish Government.

The Council then also **endorsed** the proposals regarding the Regional Strategic Bodies and the observations on the classification of incorporated colleges.

Andy Kerr and Dr Paul little returned to the meeting.

**20/75 Any other business (Oral)**

There was no other business

**20/76 Next meeting: 12 November 2020**