



REGIONAL
PATHFINDERS

Regional Tertiary Pathfinders:
Curriculum Review and Planning
in Colleges and Universities

Cover Photos:

University of Aberdeen

Borders College

SRUC

University of Glasgow



Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction and approach	9
Strategic approach to curriculum review and planning	16
Evidence of good practice	30
Issues and challenges	46
Summary and thoughts for the future	51

SFC would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their thinking and practice during this study, including the early sector-wide discussions, but especially those who came together round tables in the seven institutions in the two Pathfinder Regions and provided exemplars and case studies. Everyone is quoted anonymously.

Executive Summary

The Regional Tertiary Pathfinders Programme explored how regional collaboration among tertiary institutions, employers, and stakeholders could lead to more coherent, well communicated and sustainable education pathways and provision that align with regional economic and skills priorities.

As part of the remit for the programme SFC committed to take a deeper look at the curriculum review and planning process; to understand how institutions approach provision planning and curriculum design, and how their provision planning is proactively influenced by employers and other partners, including SFC. At the same time to understand what more SFC could do to support institutions and ensure effectiveness and efficiency in curriculum planning and review.

This report is the outcome from the work undertaken by SFC over the period autumn 2022 to spring 2024. It provides information on the principal stages involved in effective curriculum review and planning in colleges and universities. It brings both transparency and context to this critical process that may not be visible to external partners. It identifies and highlights the following:



Current and emerging curriculum planning practice across colleges and universities in Scotland, with a specific focus on the institutions within the two Pathfinder regions;



What was already working well and where processes and practice were changing and adapting, ensuring institutions were responsive and flexible in responding to local, regional and national needs;



The inherent challenges faced by institutions in operating in a complex environment;



What the sector and SFC might do differently, whether individually or collaboratively, to enhance the curriculum review and planning process in future and continue to ensure the effective delivery of coherent provision.

This report draws on the experience of a range of senior managers and curriculum planning experts from colleges and universities. SFC took soundings from expert practitioners across Scotland to support the initial mapping of the process and engaged intensively with seven institutions across the two Pathfinder Regions in the North East and the South of Scotland.

The seven institutions who arranged for us to have intensive discussions, referred to as 'deep-dives', with appropriate senior managers, were:

In the North East of Scotland

- North East Scotland College (NESCol)
- Robert Gordon University (RGU)
- The University of Aberdeen

In the South of Scotland

- Borders College
- Dumfries and Galloway College
- SRUC
- University of Glasgow

Six of these institutions were also key partners in one or more of the Pathfinder Pilot Projects.

We gathered evidence and examples of the curriculum review and planning processes in place. The examples illustrated in this report show institutions plan a forward-looking and future-proofed curriculum shaped by local, regional and national priorities to ensure they meet the needs and aspirations of students, employers and wider communities.



Photo: University of the West of Scotland

Mapping the process

We mapped the curriculum review and planning process described in the early discussions, highlighting three key phases:

1. Strategic review and planning
2. Internal development, approval and assurance
3. Delivery and monitoring

We were looking to see common practices and differences at a granular level across institutions. The diagram produced was recognised by those in both colleges and universities, as representing the curriculum review and planning process at a high level in each institution. The diagram created a shared understanding and was a useful reference point during the “deep-dive” engagement with seven institutions.

Deep dives

The deep-dive sessions with institutions explored the key stages involved in the curriculum planning and development process, particularly the early parts of the process, referred to as strategic review. This is where institutions gather a wide range of evidence to support decisions about future course provision, portfolio planning and development of curriculum and pedagogy. We looked at how institutions shape their curriculum and course delivery to meet the needs of learners and employers through the integration of graduate attributes/meta-skills and refer to examples of the validation and assurance processes in place for new courses and programmes of study.

The report draws on a range of exemplars, vignettes and case studies that illustrate the curriculum planning process in action.

Key headlines

These key headlines from the study are supported by evidence and material shared with SFC during our engagement and ‘deep dives’ with the seven institutions.



Photo: SRUC

Colleges and universities increasingly take a top-down and bottom-up approach to strategic review and curriculum planning

Evidence suggests that there has been a shift across institutions over the last 5-10 years to a more evidence-based, strategic approach to curriculum review and planning. This includes a clearer emphasis on data, intelligence and horizon scanning of future needs of the economy, balanced with institutional insight, purpose and mission. The impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the sustainability of institutions brought further momentum to this shift. This approach is referred to as ‘top-down and bottom-up’. Institutions provided examples of how they have shifted and are continuing to update their curriculum review and planning process, to ensure they are ready to meet the economic and skills needs of the future while responding to student demand and employer need.

Colleges and universities are responsive to industry, employer and student needs, and flexible in course offer/delivery mode to best meet these needs

All institutions work closely with their key stakeholders throughout their curriculum planning and review process and are well-placed to respond to current and emerging skills need.

We heard many examples of this partnership working on curriculum and course provision, through upskilling and reskilling planned initiatives and the development of microcredentials. This was particularly in response to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

Engagement with industry and employers happens at different points throughout the curriculum planning process

Colleges and universities are increasingly working with employers in the review, design, delivery and evaluation of courses and programmes of study and their input helps to ensure students have the appropriate knowledge and skills to meet employer needs and are “workplace ready”. The focus is to understand the skills and competencies required for both current workforce needs and emerging jobs of the future. This is then reflected in changes to the curriculum.

Regional collaboration with Local Authorities, schools and other key stakeholders is normal practice

Colleges, and universities, work with schools and Local Authorities (LAs) and other regional stakeholders to ensure wider understanding, and take up, of course provision and the pathways that lead to employment through “influencing the influencers”. This is particularly effective where colleges and universities come together in tripartite arrangements with the LAs and schools, for example on senior phase provision and progression and articulation arrangements.

Preparing students to thrive in the future is a priority consideration

Colleges and universities prioritise the integration of meta-skills or graduate attributes into the curriculum design and pedagogical approaches. Their focus is on developing a holistic offer and to ensure learners develop a wider set of skills, competencies and attributes, preparing them to thrive in their future endeavours, particularly as they move into the workplace.

Scotland’s Colleges and Universities are key delivery agents of education and skills. They are required to make decisions on an ongoing basis about their course and portfolio offer, curriculum and pedagogy, and to adapt and shape this in response to demand and need.

SFC can work more closely with institutions with curriculum review and planning

The way in which SFC incentivises and supports institutions may inadvertently impact on their ability to plan their portfolio offer effectively and deliver in exactly the way they might want. For example, short-term or programme-specific funding, and lack of flexibility in the funding model. It was suggested that closer working with SFC on these and other issues might help to mitigate risk.

We also look at the challenges in the system and what more could be done to enhance the curriculum review and planning process in future.

Introduction and approach

Introduction

Curriculum planning is as much about the pedagogical approach as it is the academic subject area of study. For the purposes of this study, we use curriculum in the first instance in relation to the knowledge and skills specific to an academic or subject/course area. However, we will also refer to pedagogy, as this was raised by sector colleagues, specifically in relation to the opportunities for the development of meta-skills, competencies, and attributes that prepare learners for the workplace, and to realise their future potential.

The SFC Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability 2021 proposed that a responsive, coherent system that best meets the needs of learners, employers and Scotland as a whole is based on “a planning process that enables institutions to assess how the regional and national skills and education system is functioning; to set and review their own objectives and mission; to assess their current and future provision and offer in terms of courses and volume, to identify priorities for new or different provision or to adapt existing provision.”

Taking a place-based approach, our priority in the Pathfinders Programme was to understand how institutions make changes to their curriculum to meet regional skills needs and how this contributes to delivering a coherent system. However, we understand that when taking strategic curriculum decisions, regional priorities co-exist with national priorities (and sometimes international/global), and alongside the needs of the learner, the community and industry sectors, and the future sustainability of the institution. We identified the six lenses of coherent learning provision, included at Annex 1, to further understand and contextualise these often-competing demands.



Photo: Borders College

What we set out to understand

This study focused on understanding and illustrating the curriculum planning and review process within colleges and universities and how this works to align provision to meet current and emerging skills needs. Specifically, we wanted to better understand the processes in place which underpin how institutions review and set their own portfolio objectives aligned to mission; how they assess their current provision and offer in terms of courses and volumes; how they identify priorities for new or different provision or to adapt existing provision, and how they work with others in that regional and national system.

Approach to the study

We took a structured approach to engaging with colleges and universities and gathering evidence. This informed the insights and generated the examples of practice set out in the report. This included:

- A series of meetings with two curriculum expert working groups (self-selected) – specifically one with colleges and one with universities.
- Follow up consultation with curriculum planning experts to sense check the curriculum planning map and understanding of the process.
- Discussions with key staff involved in the curriculum and planning process in seven institutions across the two Pathfinder Regions to seek feedback on the process and take a deeper look at key issues, e.g., use of intelligence and data, employer/stakeholder engagement. (referred to as “deep dives”)
- Wider sharing of the work underway with the Pathfinder National Advisory Board and the two Pathfinder Regional Delivery Boards.
- Curating case studies and exemplars from the seven institutions we engaged with.



Photo: Robert Gordon University

The initial question areas we set for the study to investigate included:

- What processes are in place to ensure appropriate curriculum review, planning and design in colleges and universities?
- What evidence base and intelligence do institutions access and use to support their decision making on course and curriculum changes?
- How is curriculum review, planning and design influenced by employers, industry bodies and other key stakeholders?
- How do institutions influence and embed smooth pathways for learners, from school to college/university, college to university and into the workplace?
- How is this planning process influenced/supported by SFC? How could this be more effective?
- How do institutions balance competing demands including: the needs of industry and specific employers, national priorities for the economy and recovery, learner demand, consideration of local communities, and their own (financial) sustainability?

Our initial discussions with the expert groups surfaced challenges and issues in curriculum review and planning including what was working well and recent innovation and transformation. This information provided SFC with a good initial understanding and focus for the next level of discussions. We capture the full set of issues here. (Annex 2)

Our priority was to understand what happens in individual institutions, and whether an overarching, coherent, evidence-based, institutional process is in place.

We wanted to identify what was considered good practice in curriculum planning and design, and what could be enhanced in the future.



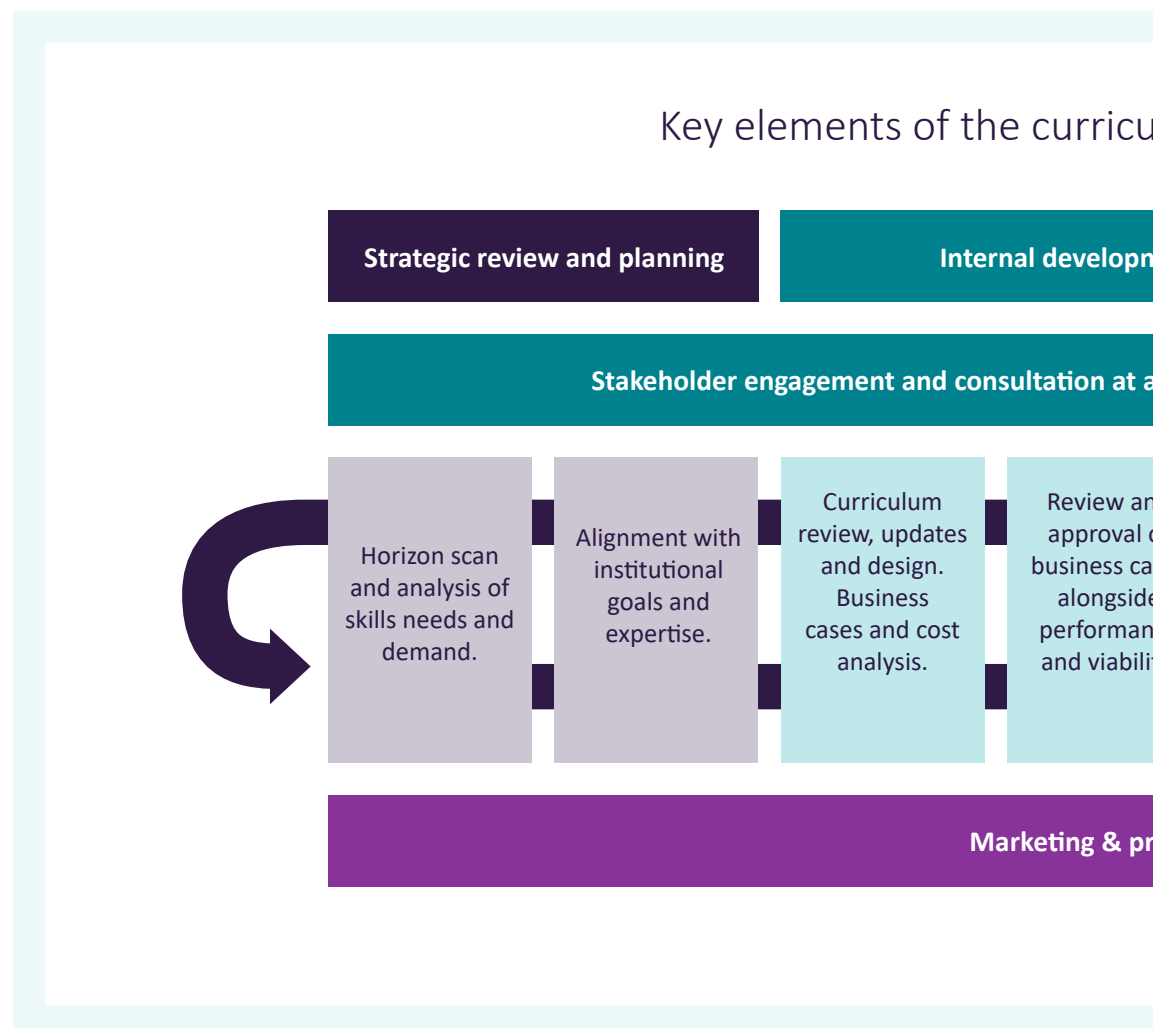
Process Map

Following initial desk-based research and engagement with the sector we undertook a process mapping exercise of the stages involved in curriculum planning in colleges and universities. What emerged was a picture which suggested commonality in the curriculum and planning process across colleges and universities despite some differences.

We tested this out with key staff from both colleges and universities. The positive responses indicated that institutions recognised their own processes and practice in the three phases described in the diagram, although the terminology they use might be different.

This suggested all institutions have an established, overarching, process in place with three generic stages:

- Strategic review and planning
- Development, approval and assurance of the curriculum
- Delivery, monitoring, evaluation.

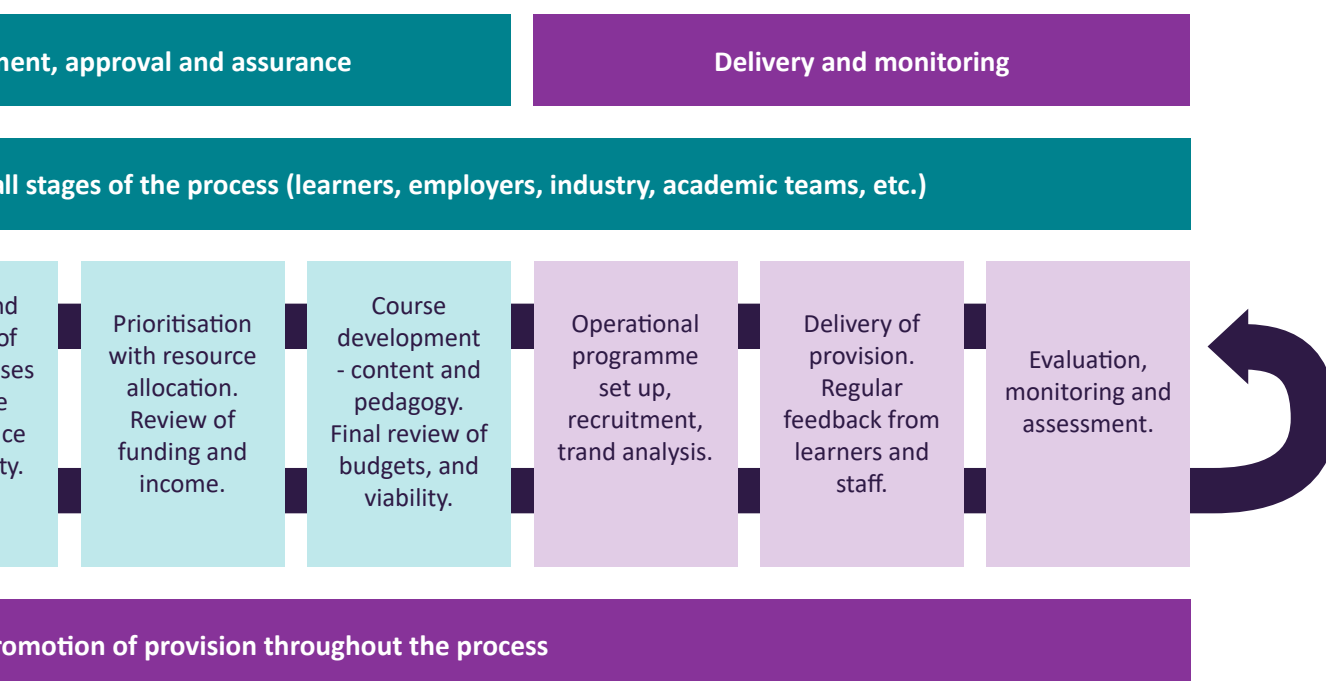


Fuller details of the three phases of the curriculum review, planning and development process is included at Annex 3.

Although we were interested in understanding practice across the whole planning process, in terms of the objectives of the Pathfinders Programme, we recognised there was particular interest from stakeholders in the first phase – strategic review and planning. Overall, the study focuses on understanding how decisions are made on portfolio and course offer, what evidence is used and assessing how responsive colleges and universities are to current and emerging regional/national skills needs.

There was also interest in understanding how ready and prepared those graduating from college and university courses and programmes of study are to take up current and emerging jobs. This study also seeks to understand how institutions structure their curriculum and pedagogy to ensure that students have the best possible opportunity to thrive in their future.

Curriculum review, planning and development process



The diagram above was adapted from the Department for Education, A Practical guide to effective practice in curriculum planning 2023

Current practice

In this report we reference information and resources shared with us as part of this study and provide a range of examples, vignettes and case studies that illustrate the curriculum planning process in action across these colleges and universities.

The seven institutions in the two Pathfinder Regions who arranged for us to have intensive discussions (referred to as ‘deep-dives’) with key senior staff, were:

In the North East of Scotland

- North East College Scotland (NESCol)
- Robert Gordon University (RGU)
- The University of Aberdeen

In the South of Scotland

- Borders College
- Dumfries and Galloway College
- SRUC
- University of Glasgow

Six of these institutions were also key partners in one or more of the Pathfinder Pilot Projects.

Institutions engaged with SFC in the spirit of openness and transparency and willingly shared their practice in curriculum review and planning. During these intensive sessions we met a range of senior staff with responsibility for various aspects of the curriculum review and planning process, including College Principals, Vice-Principals, Deans, Directors, Marketing Managers, Heads/Directors of Planning, and Heads of Curriculum.



Photo: Dumfries and Galloway College

We had a semi-structured agenda, with space for institutions to share examples of good practice, and initiatives introduced quite recently but where they could evidence a positive impact and outcome for students, employers, the region and/or the economy.

The key points highlighted by each institution during the “deep dive” sessions, as the things that were important to them in their curriculum planning and review, are captured in Annex 4.

We consider the key issues emerging and discuss these under the following themes:



Strategic Review and Planning - top-down/bottom up



Responsiveness to needs – economy, employers, industry, students



Flexible in the development of educational responses to identified (skills) needs and internal approval processes



Engagement with Employers and their contribution at key points in the curriculum planning and review process



Regional collaboration – Local Authorities, Schools, Communities – to meet identified needs



Preparing students for the next step and to thrive in the future

The seven institutions provided illustrations and evidence of the processes that are in place to review, plan and shape their curriculum. We reference a range of examples, vignettes and case studies that illustrate the processes in action across these colleges and universities.



Strategic approach to curriculum review and planning

We heard from institutions about the approaches taken in the two SFC Pathfinder regions, to reviewing their curriculum, adapting and planning course provision for the future, and the timelines they work to.

The strategic review and planning stage is a vital part of the process which provides the evidence base for making key decisions around curriculum, courses and programmes of study in alignment with institutional goals and strategic priorities.

During this stage, institutions horizon scan, research and review data and consider insights into emerging skills demand/need. They access and review labour market intelligence (LMI) and employment trends at local, national and international level; and they use market insights to research and understand student choice and demands. At

the same time, they take account of the experience and knowledge of their academic and teaching staff; and they engage with employers and industry. Their decisions about future adjustments or changes to courses are made in alignment with institutional goals and strategic priorities.

Strategic review is not a one-off activity, and institutions may return to review evidence or consider new, emerging trends and needs at any point in the overall curriculum planning process. It is critical that they can show their responsiveness and flexibility in a fast-changing environment.

It was clear from our research and initial discussions with education institutions that this process has become vital as the requirements of students, employers, and society change, and pressure to secure greater value from available resources has increased. There are both opportunities and challenges for colleges and universities in reviewing their curriculum and portfolio offer, and planning for the future.

regional skills priorities. There were seven pilot projects: three in the South of Scotland and four in the North-East.

North East Scotland College (NESCol)

NESCol, like most colleges, work to an annual cycle for curriculum review and planning. They shared a comprehensive overview of their planning process with us, including responsibilities, timelines, flexibilities, documentation, approvals, key stakeholders and challenges. The college noted that a full review of the curriculum process had been underway but was paused during the Covid-19 pandemic. The work was restarted in late 2021, and has led to further review of the process in AY2024-25.

Annual review

The college's offer is reviewed annually through a Business Priority Planning exercise, managed by the Associate Vice-Principals, with representatives from key curriculum areas, Business and Community Development and other relevant teams. This planning exercise uses Labour Market Information, environmental scanning, and insights drawn from regional stakeholders including schools, partner universities, skills agencies and employers. This is key to ensuring that the college provision is aligned with regional priorities.

“Partnership working with Developing the Young Workforce [DYW], and Skills Development Scotland [SDS] is built into the planning process, they are critical friends. Time is required for this process as we need to get positive planning for school pupils.” (NESCol, Senior Manager)

“Our partnership with Robert Gordon University [RGU] is critical and provides us with additional market insights.” (NESCol, Senior Manager)

“Employer engagement events keep us really well connected. The right qualifications and readiness for the workplace feeds the economy.” (NESCol, Senior Manager)

Data and intelligence on student demand and recruitment is considered alongside key performance indicators, including student progression and outcomes, and feedback from staff. Quality processes are integrated and streamlined to support the process. The Business Priority Planning Group can then make recommendations that will ensure the future sustainability of the college. A Curriculum Approval and Validation Panel makes final decisions on the college's course offer. This was described as a top-down, bottom-up approach to curriculum planning.

Flexibility is built into the process for changes in year. Fast-track proposals will only be considered for urgent approvals (e.g., industry requests, urgent regional needs) and group awards.

“Employer demand is a driver for fast-tracking proposals, for example, nautical safety, oil and gas, will expect a quick turnaround without losing robustness. The 17 fast tracks last year were absolutely essential.” (NESCol, Senior Manager)

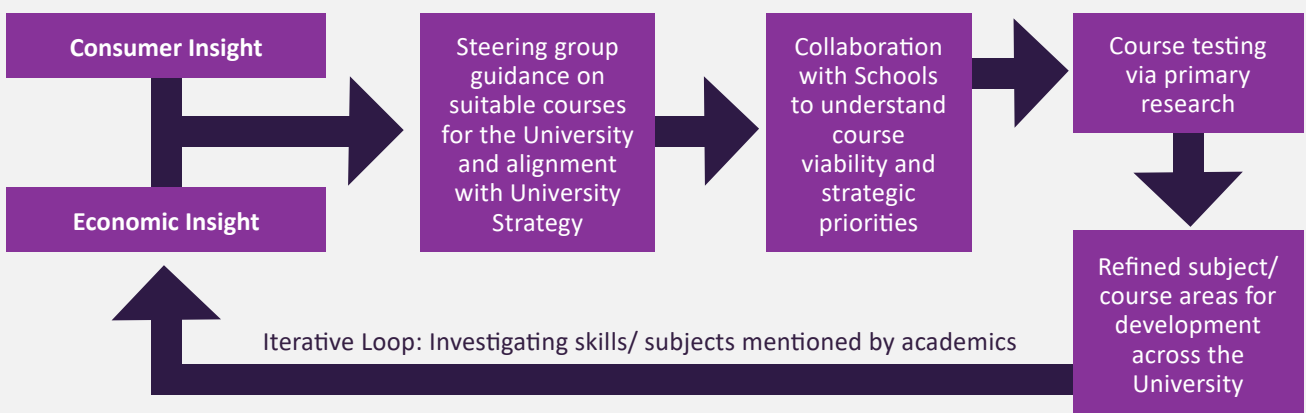
NESCol highlighted the following as key to success in their curriculum review and planning process and to ensure the future sustainability of the college:

- Collaboration and engagement with regional partners - including employers, Local Authorities, schools, universities and other stakeholders
- Responsiveness to regional demand – employers and learners – including the priorities within the Regional Economic Strategy (RES).
- Good understanding of the college's recruitment trends, PIs, and staff strengths.
- Flexibility built in to meet in year changes and priority requests.
- Ongoing review and evaluation.

Insights and Data-Driven Course Development

During our discussions RGU outlined how they identify, design and develop new programmes for their Portfolio. They provided insights on their approach to Portfolio Review, including the comprehensive market insight approach which was recently developed to ensure the University’s portfolio is led by both consumer and economic demand. At the same time there is a clear route to gather feedback from academic schools before market testing. This evidenced a clear top-down, bottom-up approach to Portfolio Development.

The approach to Portfolio Development, illustrated below, clearly outlines that both economic and consumer insights (employers and students) are taken account of.



They analyse a variety of large-scale data sources, (taking a top-down view) including:

- Sector-level data on courses and demographics
- Local and national data on the economy and jobs
- Competitor performance data
- Web traffic and search content data (consumers)

The University identifies courses that indicate both economic and consumer demand and present evidence to their Academic Schools and seek feedback on the ability of the Schools to deliver the courses. At the same time academic staff are also given the opportunity to put forward their own ideas that aligned closely with strategic plans and available expertise and resource. This then provided an opportunity for ‘bottom-up’ curriculum planning and development.

The next step is market testing with potential applicants, current learners in colleges and schools, and wider. Final recommendations are then made. This planning process ensures that the University has insights into future markets and has a sustainable pipeline of course developments for future years. RGU now has a 5-year plan for course development of online and on campus provision at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

RGU highlighted the importance of understanding what influences the course choice of prospective students. They were clear that course titles really matter and that a rapid approach to course development ensures new provision is relevant and attractive. The full process from the creation of the approach to delivering the courses recommended for curriculum development was 10 months.

“We were able to get out to market quickly. Having done it once, we understand the process works, and we can repeat in future years.” (RGU, Senior Manager)

RGU described how the ‘bottom-up’ process is factored into their annual Portfolio Review process. Each of the University’s 12 academic Schools are asked to self-reflect on the current and future suitability of their courses using a set of pre-defined criteria as a guide. The portfolio review encompasses all undergraduate and postgraduate course provision and includes evaluation against criteria including, Attraction (including recruitment patterns and numbers, articulation interest); Student Indicators (performance of previous students); Course Design (including pedagogy and opportunities to develop graduate attributes); Quality and External Comparison with other providers. The full set of results from the 12 Schools is considered by the RGU Academic Development Committee and collective decisions are reached about future changes required.

RGU also provided us with an overview of their RGUplus framework which is a structured approach to ensuring their students graduate with real world, authentic skills ready for the workplace. The framework is supported through wide collaboration across the university and industry partners and is informed by and responsive to national and international job market data and local labour market insights. This RGU exemplar is referred to later in the report.

The RGU approach highlights the following:

- The effectiveness, and necessity, of top-down and bottom-up approaches to portfolio and course development.
- Institutional sustainability is a key factor when making decisions about education and skills responses. Student demand for new course provision is critical.
- The need to understand employer needs and also be aware of what influences student choice.

RGU were clear that all their core undergraduate and post-graduate provision is focused on meeting education and skills needs – regional, national and global – although this may not always be acknowledged by wider stakeholders.

They consider that they have robust curriculum review and planning processes in place to ensure their provision is relevant to employers and to learners and aligned with economic needs. However, the short-term nature of (SFC) funding allocations can affect longer-term course planning decisions.



Photo: Robert Gordon University

University of Aberdeen

We heard how the University of Aberdeen’s curriculum review and planning process is woven into their overall strategic planning. A market-led approach to programme development takes account of the potential needs of the entirety of the University’s markets – regional, national (home), rest of UK, and international. The following two aspects were outlined as key:

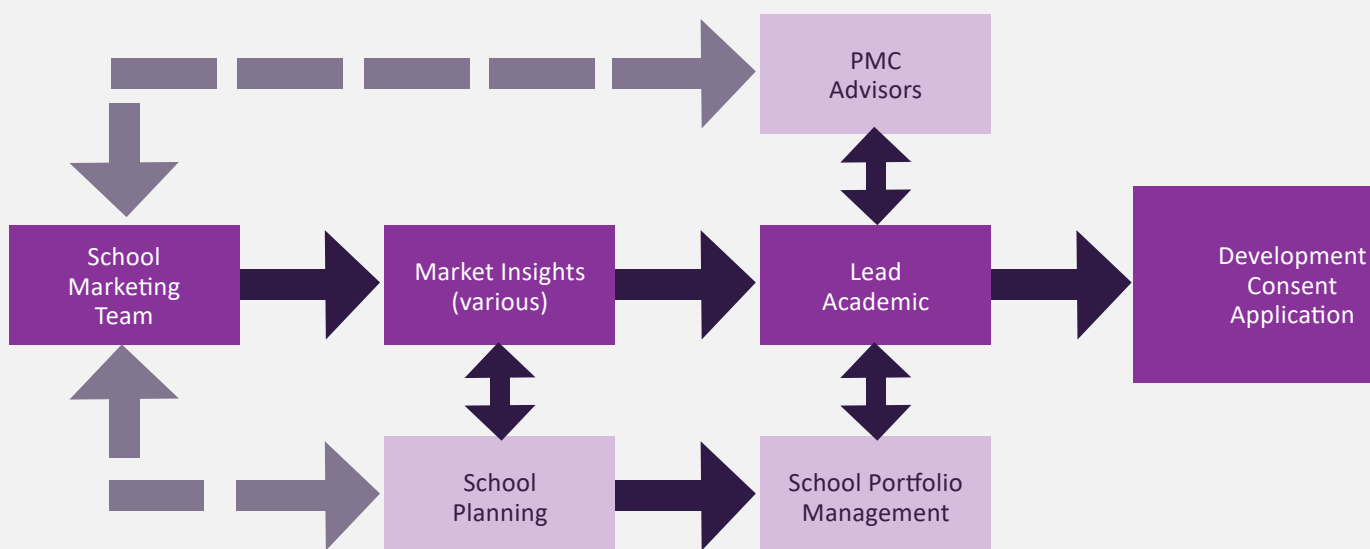
- A wide horizon scan, accessing and using LMI, data and intelligence, to highlight future growth areas and emerging demand for current and new skills, alongside a range of available historical data which indicate student interests, demands and choices.
- Active engagement with local and national employers to understand the current and future skills needs in real time. This engagement happens in a variety of ways, including via their recognised and successful Industry Advisory Boards.

At this stage the University looks to identify the areas of the labour market that indicate strong potential for growth, or indicate demand for new skills, so they can plan proactively to meet identified needs.

At the same time input from academic staff, and alignment with individual academic school plans and the University’s wider Strategic Plan, are also crucial. The University acknowledged that despite extensive data gathering, sometimes key information is not available and in these cases the knowledge and experience of academics is even more crucial.

“The expertise and knowing of our Lead Academics is crucial if specific data to support education and skills planning decisions is not available. This sits alongside insights from those who contribute to our Industry Advisory Boards.” (Senior Manager, University of Aberdeen)


Academic portfolio and programme development at the University of Aberdeen is overseen by the Programme Management Committee (PMC). The PMC provides scrutiny and assurance, acting as a gateway to proceed to the next stage of development.



Key issues emerging from discussion:

- Market scanning requires a focus on both industry/employer needs and student choice/ demands to ensure sustainability.
- Markets are regional, national, RUK and international – sometimes there are conflicting needs and demands.
- Curriculum planning and review is overseen by robust programme management, approval and validation processes.
- Development and approval timelines are flexible and take account of whether this involves substantial changes to portfolio offer or more straightforward amendments to existing courses.
- Planning for new programmes needs to build in lead times for marketing and recruitment.

The University of Aberdeen provided exemplars and case studies to illustrate how they are responsive to employer needs through innovative, flexible course provision, including upskilling; how they support the development of graduate attributes; and follow good practice in engaging with industry. These are referred to later in the report.



Programme
Management
Committee



Photo: University of Aberdeen

Borders College

Borders College introduced a new curriculum planning process in the period following the Covid-19 pandemic. A clear set of steps is in place to assess and balance the needs of employers, staff of the college, the curriculum area and the desires/needs of students. A range of data and intelligence on regional skills priorities and needs of employers underpins priority setting. The college also balances this with an understanding of what students want.

The key influences on curriculum planning decisions

- Regional Skills Assessment provided by Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
 - Local Labour Market Intelligence (LMI)
 - College Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
 - Employment opportunities
 - Upskilling needs
 - Net Zero
 - National Drivers; e.g., Foundation Apprenticeships
- and
- Funding allocations
 - Articulation opportunities
 - Quality
 - Staffing
 - Cost of delivery
 - Space
 - Health and Safety

The planning process runs on an annual cycle, with the key preparatory steps in place from June to January the following year, but there is scope for flexibility in year.

A key priority for the college is keeping the students currently in school or colleges within the region, therefore having attractive and relevant course provision and pathways that lead to local jobs is crucial.

Challenges in planning education and skills responses.

The college outlined the particular constraints/challenges that they work within:

- Borders is a small college which offers a broad curriculum – they still need the same infrastructure as a larger college.
- Addressing a wide range of employer and student needs across the region.
- Responding to the drive to net zero.
- Rurality and geographical spread of the college region.
- Timing of funding allocations, and the college's ability to meet the volume of demand is constrained by budget.

Key issues emerging from discussions

- A wide range of data and intelligence is used to make evidence informed decisions.
- A new approach to curriculum review is operating: this illustrates a top-down and bottom-up model.
- An ongoing challenge is the balancing of employer needs with student choice of course.



Date	PROCESS	ANY OTHER INFORMATION
June	Staff undertake Self Evaluation of Courses	This determines articulation arrangements, student outcome, success of External verification reports
August	Staff review courses and KPIs	This year proved difficult due to Action Short of Strike (ASOS) however teams still met to discuss KPI's
Beginning of September	Head of Sector (HOS) finalise courses from previous sessions	This is necessary for final audit for Scottish Funding Council
End of September	HOS and Assistant Principals (APs) meet with Management Information Systems (MIS) team to input course requirements for following academic session (included within this are; delivery hours, staffing, credits, duration and mode of study)	
By end of 2nd week in October	HOS upload Course requirements to pro-suite (college digital platform)	
End of October	Individual meetings arranged with college executive for dialogue and approval and agreement of next steps (use of scoring methodology)	
Middle of November	HOS complete final information on pro-suite for marketing of courses	Decision methodology used to provide evidence for either discontinuation, continuation or introduction of new full-time courses
Middle of December	Marketing team finalise the college prospectus for the following August Full-time courses and schools' academies	This ensure that information on website is accurate
12th January	All full-time and schools applications open	E-prospectus will be distributed to all secondary schools in the Borders region



Dumfries and Galloway College (DGC)

Dumfries and Galloway College recently revised its approach to curriculum review and planning to ensure they are well-placed to align their offer more closely with regional and national needs. The college has recently introduced a portfolio review process with the following objectives:

- Match skills gaps by engaging in a short, medium and long-term horizon scan for the curriculum area.
- Consider key performance indicators and whether students are well prepared for each stage of the learning journey and there is a seamless progression to employment or advanced study.
- Consider how improvement and enhancement of courses are addressed within self-evaluations.
- Examine how learning and teaching utilises in person, hybrid or online delivery approaches to deliver an effective learning experience.
- Engage in professional dialogue that scrutinises the current and future curriculum offer to ensure that appropriate resources are in place to match college planning.

Utilising a full range of LMI data and insights, fully engaging with stakeholders, including learners, employers and staff, and monitoring and evaluation of current and new provision are key aspects of the College's overall planning and review process. As a result of this, DGC are in a good position to develop (and deliver) a curriculum offer that meets the needs of employers and local stakeholders. The offer is also designed to meet students' needs, ensure relevance and align with their aspirations to enter the world of work or continue on a learning pathway.

DGC provided two short case studies to illustrate how they are working closely with regional partners and employers to design and deliver appropriate innovative and flexible provision that aligns with regional need. These are illustrated later in the report.



Photo: Dumfries and Galloway College

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)

Central to SRUC's approach to curriculum review and planning is its partnership working with industry, government, and other education providers such as schools.

“Our aim is to be an enterprise institution, co-designing our curriculum in partnership with industry, for example, and making sure we are accelerating the delivery of skills that meet industry needs,” (Senior Manager, SRUC)

The key aspects of curriculum planning, review and development at SRUC are:

- Habitual review through Annual Quality Dialogues which includes horizon scanning and monitoring/evaluating the effectiveness of current provision (top-down and bottom-up).
- Closer ties and engagement with industry and external partners feeding in at all stages of the process.
- Ongoing student liaison and feedback, including understanding student/pupil choice of programme.
- Designing learning programmes that react to the rapid changes happening across a number of industries and offering courses that are attractive and accessible to students.

This approach is embedded within SRUC's annual quality monitoring and review process.

Board of Studies

Annual Monitoring Reports - cross campus

Annual Quality Dialogues - horizon scanning and AMRs

Outcomes - Learning and Teaching Committee

Quality Enhancement Plan - governance monitoring

SRUC's bespoke programme and learning design process outlines how employers and industry are engaged at each step of the design process to ensure the development of industry-relevant programmes with innovative and focused educational content.

In addition, SRUC has recently developed an approach to curriculum design which ensures that wider graduate skills are embedded in all programmes, including full-time courses, postgraduate distance learning programmes, and apprenticeships. This is referred to as the SEEDABLE approach to curriculum design (Sustainability, Enterprise, Equality and Diversity through Active and Blended Learning). The desired outcome is a modernised curriculum, designed to future-proof graduates and meet the needs of industry and employers.

The SRUC approach to curriculum design is illustrated in a later section in this report.

The University of Glasgow emphasised the following elements as central to their strategic review and curriculum planning process. It provides evidence of a formal shift away from a supplier driven model of curriculum planning and review to a more top-down, bottom up approach.

Understanding the education and skills requirements of the workforce of the future

The University uses LMI and other sources of data and intelligence to inform strategic decisions on portfolio planning and curriculum design. This is balanced with expert input from their academic staff, who are recognised as bringing insights, expertise and understanding of the future skills requirements in the specialist subject areas and the curriculum changes required. Through close collaboration with employers, they also gain insights on emergin professional development needs and upskilling.

Market Assessment

The University's marketing team use historical HESA data, and other sources of intelligence to understand student interest and choice; they interrogate market-driven, open, online course providers to assess the course offer and the level of student demand; they consult global partners with additional marketing insights.

Engaging with local and national employers

Consideration of current and emerging skills needs and the opportunity to design courses to meet specific employer/industry needs is a key aspect of the process. The University prioritises accessibilty and flexibility to meet student and employer needs; offering different modes of study and courses delivered over a shorter time-frame to address upskilling and reskilling requirements. They recognise that employers are often looking for a speedy response to skills needs.

“We want to ensure that what we offer connects effectively to what is needed for employers, industry and for learners.” (Senior Manager, University of Glasgow)

Mission fit and capacity to respond

Senior staff assess whether the university has appropriate academic and teaching expertise, appropriate estate and teaching facilities, and appropriate professional staff to support the development and delivery of new or updated courses.

Proposals for curriculum changes and new programmes, therefore, come mainly from three sources:

- Market/gap analysis
- Academic input and insights
- Recruitment team activity

The University places a high priority on innovation and responsiveness to meet student and employer needs, while recognising the challenges in balancing regional skills needs and demand with the needs of the international market. The Programme Approval Board has a significant role in the assurance process.

For example, the University is exploring the potential to assemble micro-credentials into a stackable programme of learning to meet student and employer needs. They are also looking at how Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) can provide a pathway into learning that works at an individual level. This is illustrated later in the report.

At the same time, they continue to review and amend full degree programmes in response to changes in relevance and demand, although this requires a longer lead-in time to complete.



What does the evidence from institutions suggest?

A top-down/bottom-up approach to strategic review and curriculum planning

The illustrations of the process in place across the seven institutions provided evidence of a significant shift over the last 5 to 10 years (pre and post-Covid) from what would have been a more supplier driven model of curriculum review and planning to a more pragmatic. This was referred to by all institutions as a more 'top-down and bottom-up approach'.

"We are placing a greater emphasis on horizon scanning and checking the market for our course offer than we ever did before. Top-down information is key."

(Senior Manager, University)

This horizon scanning is balanced with expert advice and insights from academic teaching staff and curriculum managers and consideration of mission fit. This finding aligns with recent research undertaken by WonkHE specifically relating to the wider University sector.

In addition, institutions outlined how they take account of, and respond appropriately to, policy drivers from Scottish Government and from SFC. For example, the need to meet the wider needs of the economy in Scotland, as outlined by the Scottish Government in 2023 via its Purpose and Principles framework for building an excellent post-school education, research and skills ecosystem; and responding to specific SFC initiatives, some of which, but not all, may have the potential for additional funding over a designated period, such as Upskilling and Reskilling.



Photo: University of the West of Scotland

A wide range of data, intelligence and insights are accessed and analysed (to inform responsive and innovative curriculum and course delivery)

Colleges and universities access and analyse a wide range of data and intelligence to ensure evidence-based, informed decisions about future course provision and their overall portfolio. This is balanced with expert advice from academic teaching staff and curriculum managers and consideration of mission fit. This ensures they are responsive in the design and deliver of appropriate and innovative course provision.

Understanding student choice and demand and who/ what influences their choice is critical to ensuring enrolment and uptake of relevant courses that will meet employers' needs. The institutions sit between two sets of key stakeholders - firstly students who may choose subjects to study because they like/enjoy them or see it as an extension of something they have studied at school; and employers who see the courses and subjects that will provide them with a pipeline of talent to meet future skills needs as the most relevant ones.

Institutions have a duty to influence student choice which impacts directly on recruitment. A key driver to do this is their own sustainability in the longer term. We heard from both colleges and universities that this influencing role is taking up an increasing amount of resource and time.

There are benefits and challenges in accessing robust and timely data, intelligence and insights to inform curriculum review and planning. The issues around the theme of data and intelligence are explored in more detail in the SFC Pathfinders Data Thematic Report.

And awareness and understanding of shifting and emerging education and skills policy means colleges and universities can ensure greater alignment of their provision with regional and national economic needs.



“Being aware of government policy and emphasis encourages greater alignment with regional and national economic needs and is vitally important for supporting the labour market in Scotland.”

(Senior Manager, College)

Engaging with employers at each stage

Engaging with employers, industry and other key stakeholders is critical at local, regional and national level to ensure appropriate and flexible education and skills responses.

Collaboration – particularly at local and regional level

Collaboration with other key stakeholders in planning and delivery of course offer is more likely to ensure they are providing relevant education and skills offer to meet local and regional needs. (often a negotiation required).

Planning pedagogy and preparing students to thrive

We heard strong messages from all seven institutions about their role in providing opportunities for students to develop and apply meta-skills through embedding in the pedagogy. Meta-skills are transferable skills that help people adapt and succeed in life, work, and study.

Evidence of good practice

The next section of the report takes a deeper look at the five key themes emerging and provides evidence shared by colleges and universities on how they are responding in their curriculum planning and review:

- Responsive – in meeting the needs of the economy and the needs of stakeholders (including learners)
- Innovative (anticipating and planning for future education and skills needs/ future proofing)
- Engaging with Employers - at each stage of review, planning and delivery
- Collaborating – with Local Authorities, Schools, Communities to meet regional needs
- Preparing students to thrive in the future

Responsive

During our discussions we heard examples from colleges and universities on how responsive and agile they can be in meeting the needs of employers and responding to learner choice/demands. This included:

- Responding to education and skills needs emerging during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.
- Developing and targeting courses to meet specific needs of the economy through accessing the SFC Upskilling Funding (Universities)
- Meeting the needs of employers via the Flexible Workforce Development Programme. Colleges also made agile, collaborative responses to National Transition Training Fund (NTTF) and the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) demands.
- Responsiveness to education and skills needs flowing from contributions to City Deals, the Islands Deal, and net zero.
- Responding to employers to meet current and emerging regional needs.
- Meeting employer and student needs in priority subject areas through the provision of focused upskilling courses.
- Engaging with a range of stakeholders to inform the curriculum.
- Engagement with employers, and also with students, in developing upskilling courses provide institutions with important insights on current and future skills needs and also potential demand for future courses. This information feeds into their course planning and portfolio development. It means they can make evidence informed decisions when developing new courses.

Developing course provision in priority areas (with support from SFC Upskilling Funding)

Two universities provided detailed information about the value of the course provision they developed, initially with the support of SFC Upskilling funding, and their ongoing commitment to upskilling through continuing engagement with employers and students. They highlighted the importance of these initiatives in addressing skills gaps, supporting transition into new or changing sectors – such as net zero and digital, supporting greater access to opportunities and long-life learning, and meeting the needs of employers and industry.

Upskilling Online Courses

University of Aberdeen

At the University of Aberdeen robust market research informs upskilling and reskilling initiatives. The development of courses is led by academic schools and supported by central planning. Course offer is designed to be interdisciplinary. Courses can be standalone training but can also form part of a wider programme of awards to give flexibility to learners. The University uses insights and information based on the uptake of these courses to assess further demand and update flexible programmes to meet learner and employer needs.

The University is aware that demand for upskilling courses on offer has come from those looking for wider professional development that may not be available elsewhere and therefore it has the potential to grow demand.

This has prompted the University to review their overall model for online courses to consider further flexibility in delivery. They are looking at format of courses and mode of study to respond to demand; so, for example, shorter, more ‘micro-credential’ style courses, credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing.

The University aims to maintain an offering of upskilling courses that meet local and national demands – both in terms of content and mode of delivery.

Upskilling Project

University of Glasgow

“Since 2020, the University of Glasgow’s Upskilling Project has empowered over 8000 learners from Scotland and beyond to upskill and reskill. Through our courses, our learners have gained valuable skills, knowledge, and academic credits that have paved the way for exciting career advancements and further academic pursuits.

These industry-led courses span a wide range of disciplines, including project management, social policy and data visualisation. A key means through which the Upskilling course portfolio has been developed and improved is through regular learner insight and learner testimonial reports – making use of both quantitative and qualitative insights to best cater provision for prospective student cohorts.

Quantitative learner insight reports offer a means to understand who our learners are, what they are seeking to gain from Upskilling, and to determine any informative patterns of behaviour displayed by workplace-based cohorts.

This is supported by our learner success stories, offering an understanding of not only the ‘what’ but the ‘why’, and the impact and sweep of outcomes enjoyed by our learners. Since 2020, learners have reported a range of benefits, from securing employment, promotions and career development, to expanding professional networks and gaining newfound confidence in the workplace, to embarking upon an academic journey.”

Working with partners to identify and respond to upskilling needs

During our discussions we heard that:

Institutions work closely with employers, industry and community stakeholders to identify and co-design upskilling initiatives that respond to current skills gaps and future needs. Close collaboration with stakeholders ensures that programmes are aligned to needs and prepare those currently in employment with specific skills needs, or those moving into employment to be ready for their new roles. Feedback and evaluation of upskilling course provision supports future portfolio testing and development.

Upskilling the Community Learning and Development (CLD) workforce a partnership between Dumfries and Galloway College and Dumfries and Galloway Council

The regional CLD Partnership Group in Dumfries and Galloway identified workforce concerns both in relation to the loss of experienced staff but also the lack of a talent pipeline to support the future needs of the Community Learning and Development sector. In response to these concerns, the college worked closely with current practitioners, CLD Standards colleagues and community volunteers to develop and design a future focussed and digitally supported curriculum model which would offer greater flexibility for learners and improve uptake and completion.

The flexible hybrid programme design included in-person induction, reflection and collaborations sessions agreed with learners. The learning was further supported by asynchronous, any place any time, learning activities and individual and group synchronous learning sessions. This allowed practitioners to study at their own pace around work and life commitments whilst ensuring engagement and peer collaboration. It provides learners who work or volunteer the flexibility to learn and study in their own time and gain a professional development award.

As well as insight into CLD theory and practice, the 18-week programme allows learners to focus on their practical involvement in community capacity building using their lived practice for assessment and development evidence.

Flexible (and collaborative)

During our discussions we heard that:

- Colleges and universities are flexible and responsive in planning and responding to emerging skills gaps and curriculum needs. They do this in collaboration with their key stakeholders.
- Colleges have knowledge and good understanding of regional demand and skills needs. Their curriculum planning is based on solid portfolio experience alongside evidence gained from collaboration with employers, schools, industry bodies, community groups, SFC, SDS and other key regional and national bodies.
- Universities balance regional, national and global market and demands for a skilled workforce with student interest and needs

Flexible courses and pathways

Short, flexible courses, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and micro-credentials, are a key part of the sector's response to meeting employer needs and learner demand. They are designed and developed to cover in-demand areas and accessible to learners looking to build skills and knowledge.

Industry-relevant Skills and Pathways

University of Glasgow

Building on their experience of offering MOOCs and micro-credentials, and the ongoing demand experienced, the University of Glasgow has created a pathway through a series of online courses, allowing learners to build on their knowledge and skills and progress to a higher level. The courses are tailored to meet identified skills gaps and to deliver specific intended learning outcomes. The University has benefited from partnering with specific employers in shaping this academic offer.

The range of micro-credentials on offer provide low-cost entry points for potential learners. The University has mapped out a range of routes at various levels and with different types of provision to support flexibility for those upskilling, for example in health. Through MOOCs and micro-credentials, learners can build up their knowledge and skills in a stackable way with the ability to build up credits. They then have the potential to build a pathway to a degree programme.

This structured approach gives learners flexibility in their learning and it supports employers, in areas where there are identified skills gaps, to enhance learners' professional knowledge and development.

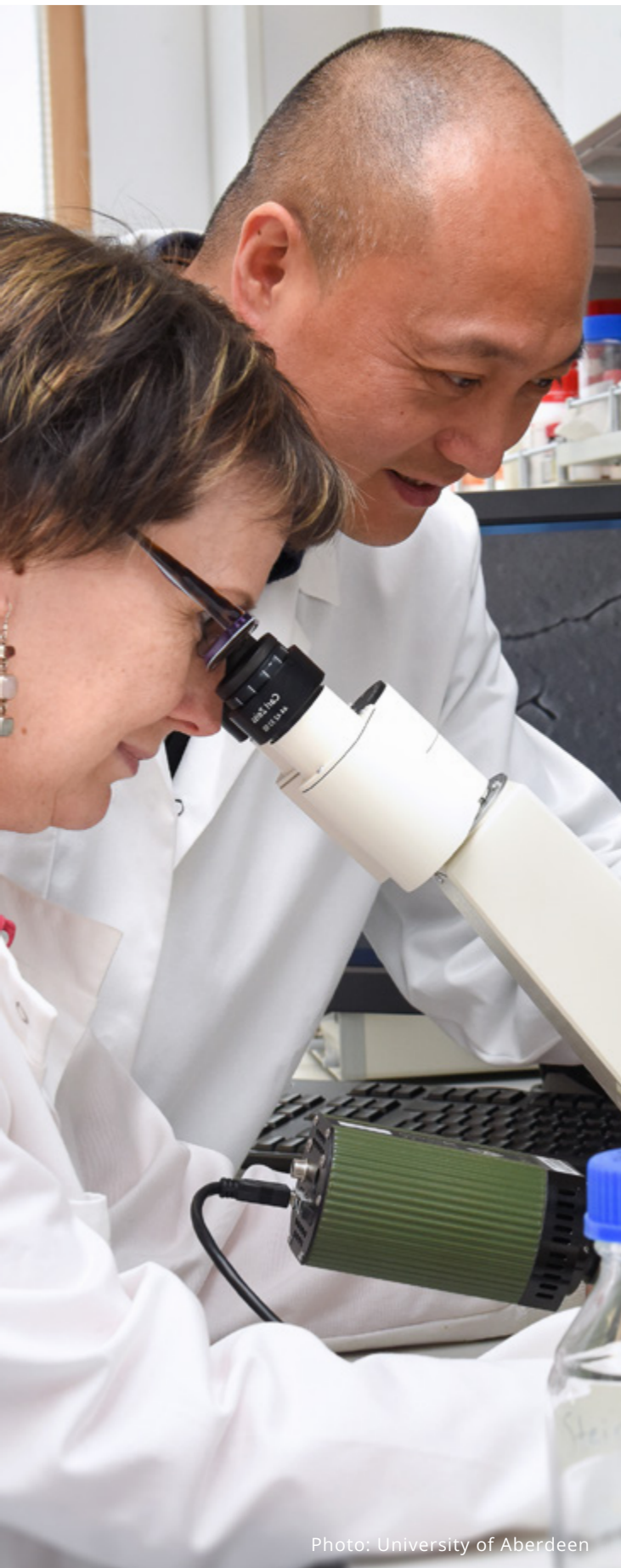


Photo: University of Aberdeen

University of Aberdeen – Innovation in Learning and Teaching

Innovation in teaching and learning, especially in relation to skills development and career readiness, and meeting the skills needs of not only the University's students, but also the wider community and employers, are key components of what the Programme Management Committee (PMC) at the University of Aberdeen look for in new academic course proposals.

The University provided an example of a new course, recently approved by the PMC, which falls into this category and meets the criteria above. This demonstrates innovation in design, responsiveness to an identified need and flexibility in terms of programme design and mode of study.

MSc Health Data Science (Online)

University of Aberdeen

In late 2023 the University of Aberdeen's Programme Management Committee gave approval for a new online part-time variant of the MSc in Health Data Science. This programme is delivered by the University's prestigious Aberdeen Centre for Health Data Science (ACHDS). ACHDS is working with partners, including the NHS, to create innovative data science solutions to big health care challenges, to improve health and care for individuals, local, national and global communities.

Across Scotland, the rest of the UK and internationally, there is a critical shortage of people who are skilled in the use of data science, including machine learning and AI, for health care. This new innovative, flexible academic programme will help to address this shortage, by allowing students to engage in learning at a distance. This has been welcomed by partners.

In addition to encouraging the development of innovative and flexible academic courses that respond to identified skills needs, the University continues to review its existing portfolio of academic programmes and courses to ensure they meet the needs of students, the wider community and employers.

Programme and Learning Design Process

SRUC

SRUC has a framework and methodology in place to support and oversee the development of high-quality, industry-relevant programmes that meet the needs of a diverse range of learners and also respond to needs identified by employers.

This approach focuses on both programme design and learning design. The learning design begins with a full analysis of the respective industry area they are responding to. This identifies future trends and the necessary skills and capabilities for learners to succeed in employment. Additionally, a light-touch competitor analysis helps identify sector best practices and unique selling points for SRUC's offerings.

The next step in the learning design is to establish the knowledge, skills and values that students should acquire; and to outline programme learning outcomes. Finally, extensive engagement with stakeholders – including industry representatives, learners and partners – help to refine and flesh out the programme.

This process is designed to be flexible and applies to all courses but allows short courses and training programmes to undergo a shorter programme design process. By integrating stakeholder feedback, market analysis, and a commitment to pedagogical excellence, SRUC aims to offer programmes that are innovative, responsive and impactful.

Engagement with employers and industry

Colleges and universities are increasingly involving employers in the design, delivery and evaluation of courses and programmes of study and their input helps to ensure students are “workplace ready” and have the appropriate skills to meet employer needs.

Institutions are increasingly engaging with employers on both the skills and knowledge required in the curriculum. The conversations that we had during this study illustrate the variety of ways and places where this engagement with employers happens. The focus is to understand the skills and competencies required for both current workforce needs and emerging jobs of the future.

Any new curriculum development needs to bring employers round the table in partnership to inform and steer. They are a key part of curriculum planning and delivery, validation of courses and the evaluation process working with universities and colleges.

Colleges access local level data and insights through the positive relationships they build with employers and are able to respond to the needs of these employers, including SMEs.

Universities are linked into employer/industry groups in numerous ways in the curriculum review, planning, validation, delivery and evaluation process.

Industry and advisory boards and panels

Industry and advisory boards and panels, composed of industry experts, professional bodies and employers, alongside academic leads, education/teacher directors and programme coordinators, help guide development of courses and modules to ensure content and skills gained are relevant and current. There are real benefits for both staff and students from this engagement. Academic leaders and curriculum planners also work closely with employers to provide opportunities for work-based learning and placement opportunities within specific sectors and workplaces.

Working with industry in engineering programme design, delivery and review,

University of Aberdeen

At the University of Aberdeen School of Engineering partners from a range of disciplines (including Chemical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Energy Transition) sit on the School's Industry Advisory Board.

The structure for this engagement, developed by the University, has allowed education provision in the School of Engineering to benefit from the coordinated oversight and advice from industry bodies.

Consultation with industry on programme design and review is critical to ensure programmes are relevant and appropriate by design and continue to adapt to the ever-changing external societal and industrial landscapes.

identified skills gaps, to enhance learners' professional knowledge and development.

Curriculum Design for Healthcare Support Workers in the National Health Service (NHS)

Dumfries and Galloway College (DGC) working with NHS Dumfries and Galloway

Dumfries and Galloway College outlined a joint planning initiative with NHS Dumfries and Galloway to identify the further academic qualifications and skills required for Healthcare Support Workers in acute and community roles.

In discussion with NHS Dumfries and Galloway and through effective horizon scanning, as part of DGC's curriculum planning process, a new career opportunity for Healthcare Support Workers was identified. However, further academic qualifications and skills were required to fill the new posts. The NHS and DGC worked in partnership constructing a curriculum plan, and implementation of the HNC qualification needed to fill this gap.

DGC highlighted the importance of employer relationships and regional intelligence as key sources of information when planning qualifications and education and employment pathways.



Influencing and guiding pathways from school

During the study we heard that:

- Colleges and universities are experienced in managing pathways, including entry and exit points for their learners, and this requires excellent partnership working with schools, communities and employers.
- Colleges work well with their local schools to share data and insights, plan new curriculum and pathways and ensure uptake in senior phase and college courses. This can include a key influencing role.
- Colleges and universities work in tandem with schools and local authorities to “influence the influencers” and ensure wider understanding and take up of new course provision and pathways that lead to jobs in the region.

Engagement with schools is central to effective curriculum planning and smooth pathways, particularly for colleges given their contribution to senior phase provision but also for universities.

Colleges shared the following with us:

Borders College Schools Academy

Borders College work closely with schools and Borders Council to develop and provide provision and courses within the college setting.

The Borders College Schools Academy provides an integrated approach to education, where senior phase pupils are given the opportunity to learn a range of vocational skills, both practical and academic. These provide pupils with a vocational pathway on to further and higher education at a range of different levels. Senior pupils who are successful in gaining their qualification through this programme and have satisfactory references will be offered a full-time place on a related college course the following year.

Most of the Schools Academy courses are based on Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) National Qualifications at a range of levels. Successful completion of Unit Assessments or full National Certificates will appear on SQA Certificates along with other qualifications attained at school.

In order to strengthen participation in senior phase provision across their nine partners schools in the region, and to ensure smooth pathways from school to college, Borders College applied learning from their enhanced curriculum planning process to their schools' programme. Partnership working was key, so they established a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) with membership including Head Teachers, Senior Managers, Students, Employers, and college teaching and support staff. The aim was to review pathways while also enhancing the delivery model. The focus was on raising attainment, enhancing the experience, linking to regional skills needs, opportunity to gain additional qualifications and ensure parity of access and learning.

“We have made slow and steady changes to our curriculum planning for our schools’ provision. We recognise where curriculum wasn’t working for students. We expect retention to increase as a result and for pupils to be better prepared for the next step in their learner journey.” (Senior Manager, Borders College)

The success of the curriculum review was reflected in the following:

- Portfolio is now aligned to regional need (e.g., in agriculture, school pupils visit farms and estates and contextualise their learning, rather than having two hours in a classroom and being unable to offer placement).
- A 21% increase in applications to the Schools Academy for session 24/25.
- Transport issues now addressed.



Photo: North East Scotland College

NESCol - Enhancing the Senior Phase

As part of their curriculum planning and review process, NESCol considers historical schools' data that indicates previous uptake and demand for schools' provision, student experience and outcomes. Working closely with Head Teachers, schools and the two Local Authorities is key to getting their offer for pupils right and maximising uptake, as well as regular engagement with SDS and DYW NE.

“Through partnership working with DYW and SDS, we are able to gain insights and intelligence and plan positively for school pupils. We put time into both these partnerships – they are critical friends. They are also a gateway to other networks.”
(Senior Manager, NESCol)

NESCol led the Pathfinder Pilot project in the North East which focused on enhancing the senior phase provision in the region through three 'tests of change'. A key learning point from the pilot was the need for the College to do more to engage with those who are in a position to influence pupil choice on courses and pathways.

As part of the delivery of the pilot the College, along with key partners, organised an autumn 2024 conference event in Aberdeen, Promoting Positive Pathways, which brought together key regional education partners and those who are closest to pupils, to focus on pathway planning for senior phase pupils. This collaborative event was the first of its kind in the North East of Scotland and included representation from 28 secondary schools in two local authorities.

Other colleges outlined that a key challenge in aligning subject progression and pathways with schools' provision is often a lack of synergy between schools offer and college offer. Some suggested that this is partly a result of the accreditation role of SQA in qualifications. The way to mitigate this is to continue to engage closely and ensure an ongoing dialogue with schools and Local Authorities.

Another Pathfinder Pilot Project in the South of Scotland which builds on a longstanding partnership with the Local Authority and schools to deliver aspirations for learners is West of Scotland Educational Pathways. University of the West of Scotland and Dumfries and Galloway College are working with schools to provide senior phase school students with pathways into degree-level study through newly developed joint routes.

More information about West of Scotland Educational Pathways is available in the [Pathfinders Curriculum Thematic Report](#).





Photo: Robert Gordon University

Preparing students to thrive in the future and transition to the workplace

During the study we heard that:

- Colleges and universities make a commitment to provide learning experiences, and develop curriculum and pedagogy that prepare all students to move to the future with confidence and to thrive. The education system is pivotal in supporting the development of well-rounded individuals ready to engage positively and have impact in their future life.
- Providing opportunities for students to develop the meta-skills/graduate attributes they will require in their future work and life is a high priority for all institutions. Institutions consider and review how best to integrate meta-skills in the curriculum and how they can best deliver and resource.
- Curriculum responses also need to respond to changes in the labour market. For example, the integration of digital information and technologies into many jobs means that learners need to have digital skills built into their study. Another skills area where a multi-disciplinary approach is useful is in setting up a new business. One approach suggested would be to embed entrepreneurial skills across all programmes.

All institutions in our study were keen to share details with us about how they ensure the integration of meta-skills or graduate attributes into the curriculum design and pedagogical approaches. Their focus is on developing a holistic offer to develop a wider set of skills, competencies and attributes for learners, preparing them to thrive in their future endeavours, particularly as they move into the workplace.

Colleges (and Skills Development Scotland) were more likely to use the term meta-skills while universities referred to graduate attributes. Although there may be slight differences across institutions in what is included under both umbrella terms, these are essentially the additional skills students need that go beyond disciplinary and subject expertise,

technical knowledge and skills. They include, amongst others, communicating, collaborating, leading, critical thinking, problem solving, innovation and creativity, inter-disciplinary knowledge, inquiry and research capabilities and entrepreneurship. These have been previously referred to as “employability skills” or “global citizen skills”.

Colleges and universities have been responding to providing these additional skills in a variety of ways. There is a consensus that to be more effective this learning needs to be contextualised within course provision or practised within a workplace.

In our discussions we heard about innovative approaches to designing and integrating meta-skills and graduate attributes within a student’s programme of study. The examples in this section outline the practice across institutions, including reference to institutional-wide structured frameworks which sit alongside the curriculum and provide a cohesive approach to the development of meta-skills and graduate attributes. Others offer a variety of additional opportunities to students, including project work, collaborative, cross-department projects, society and community projects, and work placements.

RGUplus

Robert Gordon University

RGU has developed a structured framework, called RGUplus, which provides the opportunity for students to build their skills beyond the classroom through integrating different experiences in different environments. This includes community engagement, work placements and work experience, public service opportunities and volunteering.

The programme promotes cross-cutting themes of sustainability and entrepreneurship. The approach was developed with industry partners in response to national and international job market data and local labour market insights and designed to prepare students to be well-rounded global citizens. In addition, there is credit and award bearing recognition of the value added in the community via the Denis Law RGUplus Award Programme.

“Guiding our students, RGUplus will provide the environment and learning that is needed for students to develop their understanding of social, economic, environmental, and political views. RGUplus places RGU on the world stage as a unique innovator in higher education, constructively developing curricula to advance sustainability, creating the graduate with an entrepreneurial mindset who through community and industry informed learning will leave us with a well-rounded ‘global mindset.’ (Senior Manager, RGU)

SEEDABLE Programme

SRUC

SRUC has developed a competence-based approach to curriculum design, assessment and feedback through their SEEDABLE (Sustainability, Enterprise, Equality and Diversity through Active and Blended Learning) Curriculum. This programme is a key part of their vision to become 'Scotland's Enterprise University at the heart of the natural economy' and is a whole-institution approach. It supports their learners to develop an enterprising mindset, builds essential entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, and enhances the business skills to of the next generations.

The diagram below highlights the college-wide pictorial summary of the SEEDABLE Curriculum, which is expected to take six years to complete. The SEEDABLE review process is a multi-year effort with short and medium-term outcomes and long-term impact built in.

SRUC will develop a strategic and deeper focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals within their SEEDABLE programme. The aim is to develop enterprise knowledge and competence through non-business modules and units, use active learning activities and techniques to enhance proactive approaches to accessibility, further develop equality and diversity into the curriculum, and broaden the approach to students as partners and build closer ties with external partners and industry.

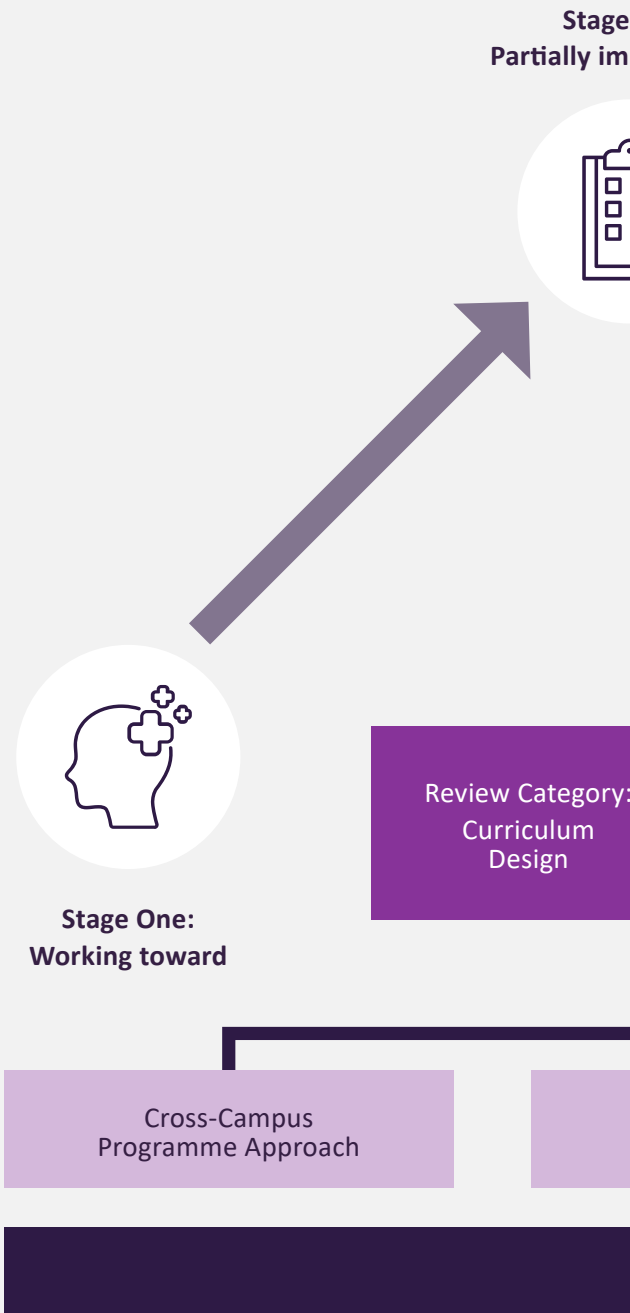
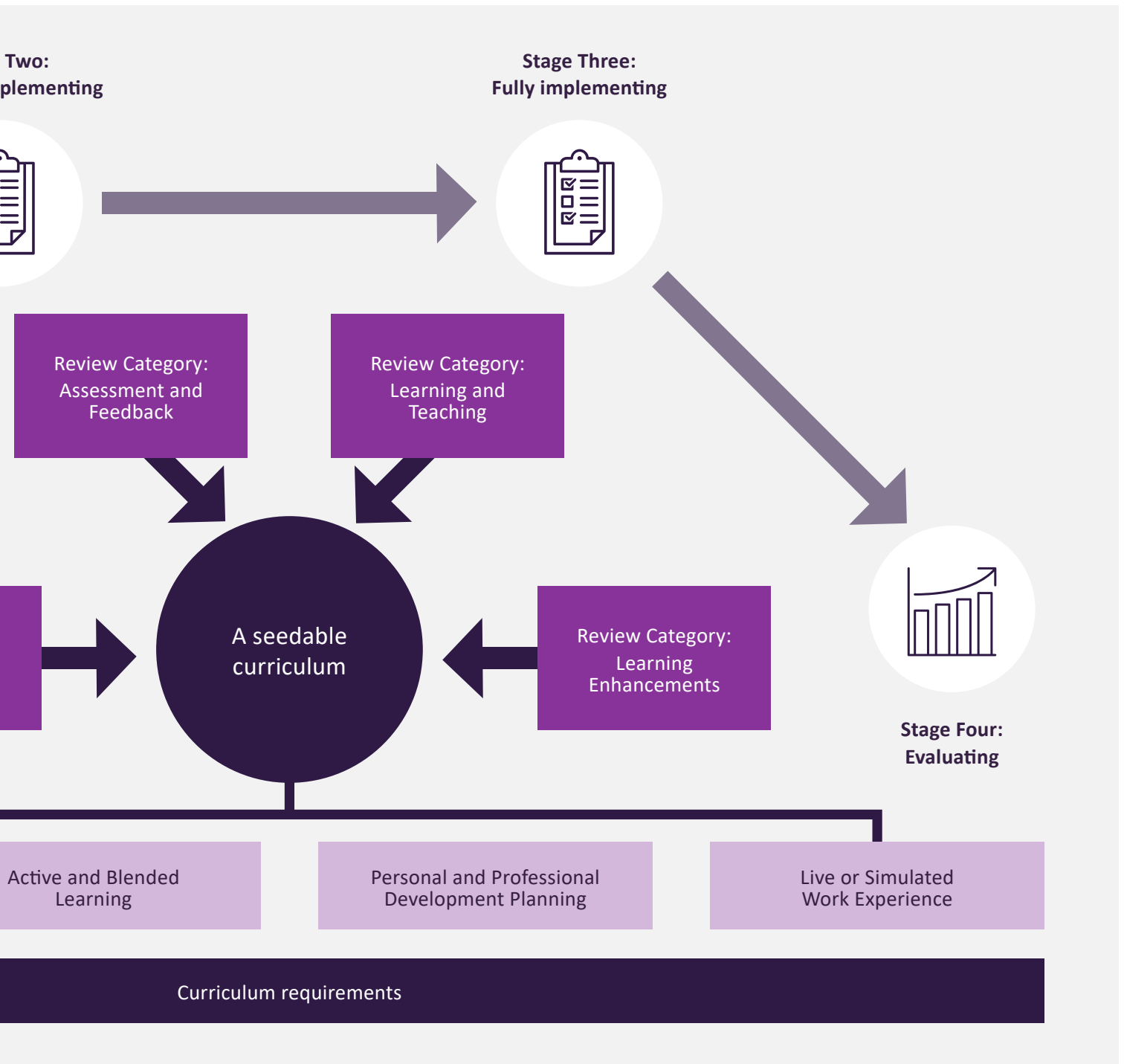


Photo: SRUC



Building employability post pandemic: embedding professional skills in the curriculum

University of Glasgow

Concern about their students' employment opportunities during and post the Covid-19 pandemic, motivated the College of Social Sciences Student Experience Team, working with the Careers Service, Student Learning and Development and academic colleagues, to develop and launch a suite of professional skills training modules. The modules were designed to support undergraduate and postgraduate taught students to reflect on and develop key employability skills at critical stages of their study.

The suite of professional skills courses covers themes such as groupwork and presentation skills, policy writing and collaborative research, reflection on and communication of professional skills.

Initially, these courses were designed as co-curricular, 'opt-in' courses. However, the move to online enabled the University to 'scale up' these courses. This opened the door to a much more significant transition to embed core professional skills training within credit-bearing provision across undergraduate and postgraduate taught teaching in the College.

Embedding meta-skills and graduate attributes into institutional strategies

Some institutions confirmed that their commitment to developing and delivering meta-skills and graduate attributes is embedded into institutional strategies. University of Aberdeen, for example, highlighted how their 2040 strategy is shaping the approach to education and focuses on the development of Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and Skills. These will inform the design of the curriculum going forward to ensure all degrees offered by the University support students in developing these attributes and skills through their studies. This framework also looks at embedding employability aspects, such as work placements, within the curriculum to support future employability of graduates.

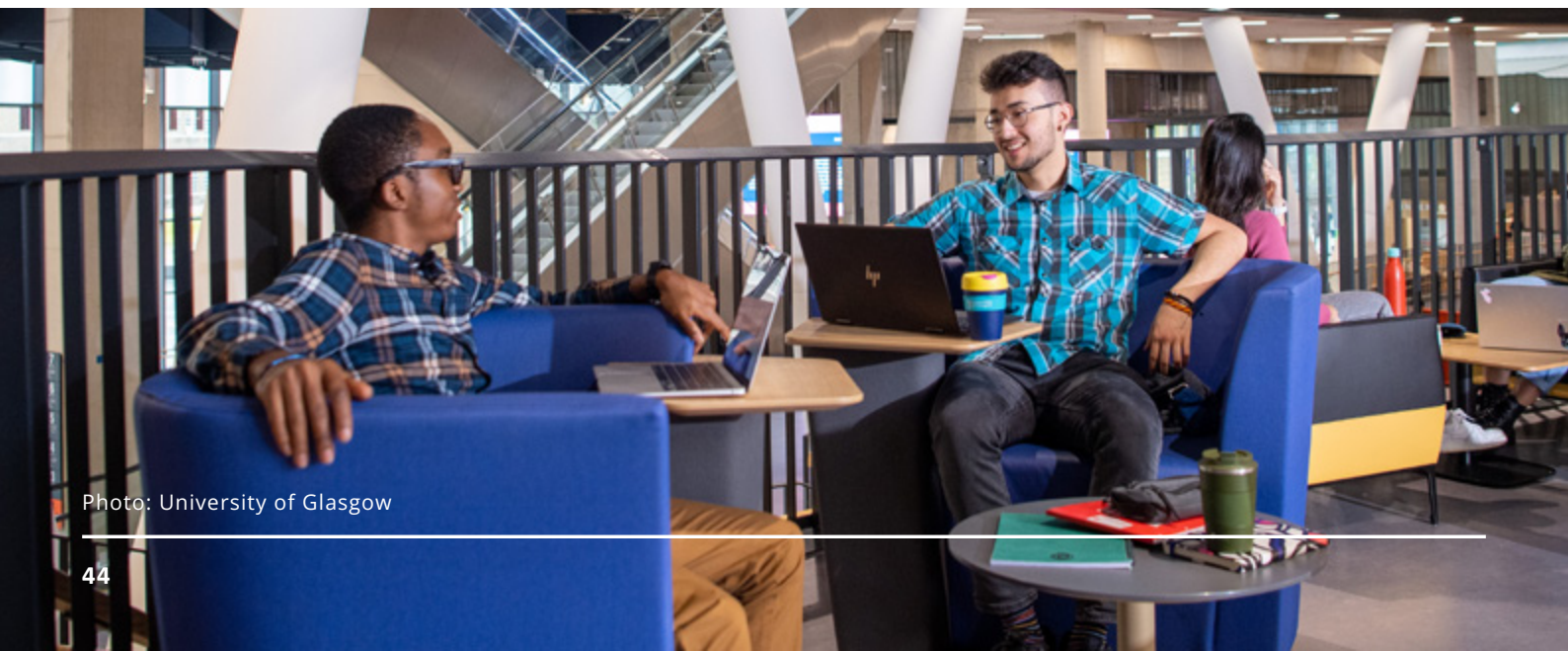


Photo: University of Glasgow

Work placements support delivery of transferable skills alongside technical skills

University of Aberdeen

The placement year offered by the University of Aberdeen provides an opportunity for students to take their theoretical knowledge and apply it in a professional setting and to develop transferable skills/graduate attributes along the way. It also gives students the opportunity to develop essential technical skills directly relevant to their chosen fields, preparing them to be more effective when they enter the workforce.

The University shared a case study illustrating the experiences of three students in a placement year programme, based on their own words used when reflecting on their experience over the year.

Anna, a Molecular Biology student, completed her placement year at the Pirbright Institute. Her year not only exposed her to the intricacies of a professional research environment but also instilled the importance of professional conduct. Anna emphasises the significance of being well-prepared for meetings and presentations, a skill highly valued by employers across many sectors. The meticulous record-keeping practices she adopted during her placement year further enhanced her attention to detail, a crucial quality for ensuring accurate and reliable research outcomes. Anna also highlighted the importance of resilience and an ability to deal with setbacks, with unexpected experimental results at times during her placement year. Learning to adapt and troubleshoot challenges during her placement year developed her critical thinking and planning skills, valuable assets for navigating the complexities of any professional environment.

The experiences of Anna and two other students, referred to in the full case study, highlights the impact that a well-structured higher education programme, particularly one with a strong emphasis on practical application, can have on skills development and employability.

Integrating skills into core provision

Integrating specific skills into existing course and curriculum areas is another way to ensure learners have the opportunity to develop the additional skills they will need in the workplace. A collaboration between the two colleges in the South of Scotland, and other key regional stakeholders, a Pathfinders Pilot Project, has successfully integrated digital content into curriculum areas such as business, computing, health and social care. This increased learners' confidence in practising and applying these skills within their subject area and contributed to developing an adaptable digital workforce. Further details of this pilot initiative and early success are explored in the Pathfinders Curriculum Thematic Report



Issues and challenges

In summary

All seven institutions provided evidence of the robust processes they have in place to review, plan and shape the curriculum and the approval and validation frameworks that have oversight.

This evidence suggests there has been a transformation in the approach to curriculum review and planning over the last 5-10 years with more emphasis on horizon scanning and evidence-based decision-making balanced with institutional insight, purpose and mission. (top-down and bottom-up)

Time required for curriculum change varies depending on the scale of the change. Many situations can and do adapt planning and delivery timelines to meet urgent employer and industry needs, local, regional and national and this is built into their approval processes.

Colleges and universities have a track record in curriculum planning and review and are innovative and responsive to meet employer needs and student interest.

Ongoing employer input is factored in throughout the planning and review process and we heard examples of how this is used to ensure institutions align their course and portfolio development to real-world needs.

Colleges and universities are working to ensure that the right curriculum, pedagogies and learning experiences are in place to provide learners with the best opportunity to be employability ready and to adapt and thrive in the future.

Key messages

Evidence-based decision making

- Colleges and universities access and use a wide range of data and LMI – local, regional, national and global – when planning and reviewing their curriculum and their wider portfolio. This can be more readily available regional and national LMI and it can also be commissioned, tailored marketing data. They invest time and resource in analysing this information and then use it to make evidence-based decisions about their future curriculum and course/portfolio offer.
- More granular, locally focused LMI can influence an institution’s real-time decisions about course provision, aligned with employer needs and pathways into job opportunities in the region.
- Universities particularly have to balance their responses to regional and national needs with the asks of a global market. Financial sustainability remains a key consideration.
- Insights and intelligence from teaching, academic, marketing and recruitment staff and their contacts is central to understanding local/regional/national need and market demand (students), particularly where there is conflicting evidence.
- There was a view from some colleges that their local and regional insights and intelligence were underutilised in wider regional discussions about skills needs.

Responding to education and skills needs and gaps is complex (and filled with expectations)

- The current economic context requires colleges and universities to be ever more agile and responsive.
- Institutions need to engage with prospective students about the programmes and courses which will provide a pathway to employment in the future and

“Skills that employees will need in the future are not necessarily known now. We need to be constantly aware of this.”

(Senior Manager, University)

- Focus is needed on qualifications that best fit the skills needs.
- Recognise the demographic challenge and the current issue with people supply. This is important so that labour shortage is not conflated with skills gaps.
- Utilising existing staff resource, while taking forward changes to meet future needs/demands is challenging.
- Focus should be on sustainability and reducing duplication across the sector where possible.

Working with employers

- Institutions and employers/industry need to work together to future-proof the curriculum, and this requires taking a longer-term view/forecast of the skills that will be required for jobs of the future.
- Colleges and universities cannot prepare individuals for specific job vacancies. Employers and professional bodies also have a role.
- Employers have a role in responding to the ongoing development and upskilling needs of their workforce.
- Working with and responding to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) requires tailored approaches.
- Leads of academic schools/curriculum leads are responsive to employer and industry needs but it can take time to develop new courses and to ensure there will be a market. Employers may have to adjust their expectations.

“The speed at which change to curriculum is required can be a challenge.”

(Senior Manager, College)

Working with schools (and Local Authorities)

- We heard from colleges about their positive relationships with the schools and local authorities in their region and how they work collaboratively on senior phase provision and to ensure a flow of pupils into college provision that meets pupil needs and prevents young people falling out of education.
- The availability of good advice and information for school pupils to inform choices about subjects, qualifications and careers is crucial. There can be a mismatch in demand for courses/course choice of school leavers with the courses colleges are offering and recruiting to, which are focused on sectors and areas where the current jobs are, and future jobs will be.
- Universities also have good relationships with schools and look to better understand the choices and decisions pupils make with regard to their future education pathway. This contributes to more informed alignment of portfolio to demand.



Photo: Dumfries and Galloway College

What should SFC be aware of?
And what can SFC do differently to support institutions?

Funding

- More flexibility in the SFC funding model, and assurance on future funding, could create a difference in how the sector is able to respond and deliver the skills required for the future, particularly in relation to regional skills responses and coherent provision.
- Short-term, programme-specific funding is not helpful and impacts on how innovative and responsive institutions can be.

“The more unstable the funding, the less agile institutions can be.”

(Senior Manager, College)

- The sector needs to work closely with SFC to mitigate the impact of a future funding scenario that is going to be challenging and will require choices and key decisions on coherent provision, agreeing priority education and skills responses, and how to do this more effectively and efficiently.

Timelines

- Consider how SFC’s planning timelines and funding announcements could align more closely with those of the sector.
- Stakeholders and employer partners may not be aware of the importance of the Minister’s Letter of Guidance to SFC on priority setting for the sector and timelines for outcomes and assurance, which in turn impacts on their responsiveness and curriculum and portfolio decisions.

Reporting

- It helps institutions when SFC reporting requests are timely and clear, without last minute changes.



Photo: North East Scotland College

Partnership working and expectations

- Recognise the strong tradition across the sector of working constructively with employers and community partners to develop and deliver programmes which meet local and national needs. However, institutions also need to focus on preparing learners to adapt and flex in their future employment.

“Industry demand can be for a specific need at a moment in time which moves on. Our students require a much more rounded curriculum, that prepare them to be flexible in the future.”

(Senior Manager, University)

Coherent provision

- Ongoing dialogue in partnership with institutions on their curriculum and portfolio planning and input on how SFC can support coherent provision regionally and nationally would be welcomed by the sector.

“Coherence requires design, and this requires expertise, time and resource. Universities and colleges are well-placed to deliver in partnership working alongside SFC.”

(Senior Manager, University)

- The acknowledgement that all colleges and universities have a clear, robust curriculum planning processes in place will provide assurance to SFC and other key stakeholders, while also appreciating that aspects of the process will be unique to individual institutions depending on the type of institution, their mission, and their stakeholders.

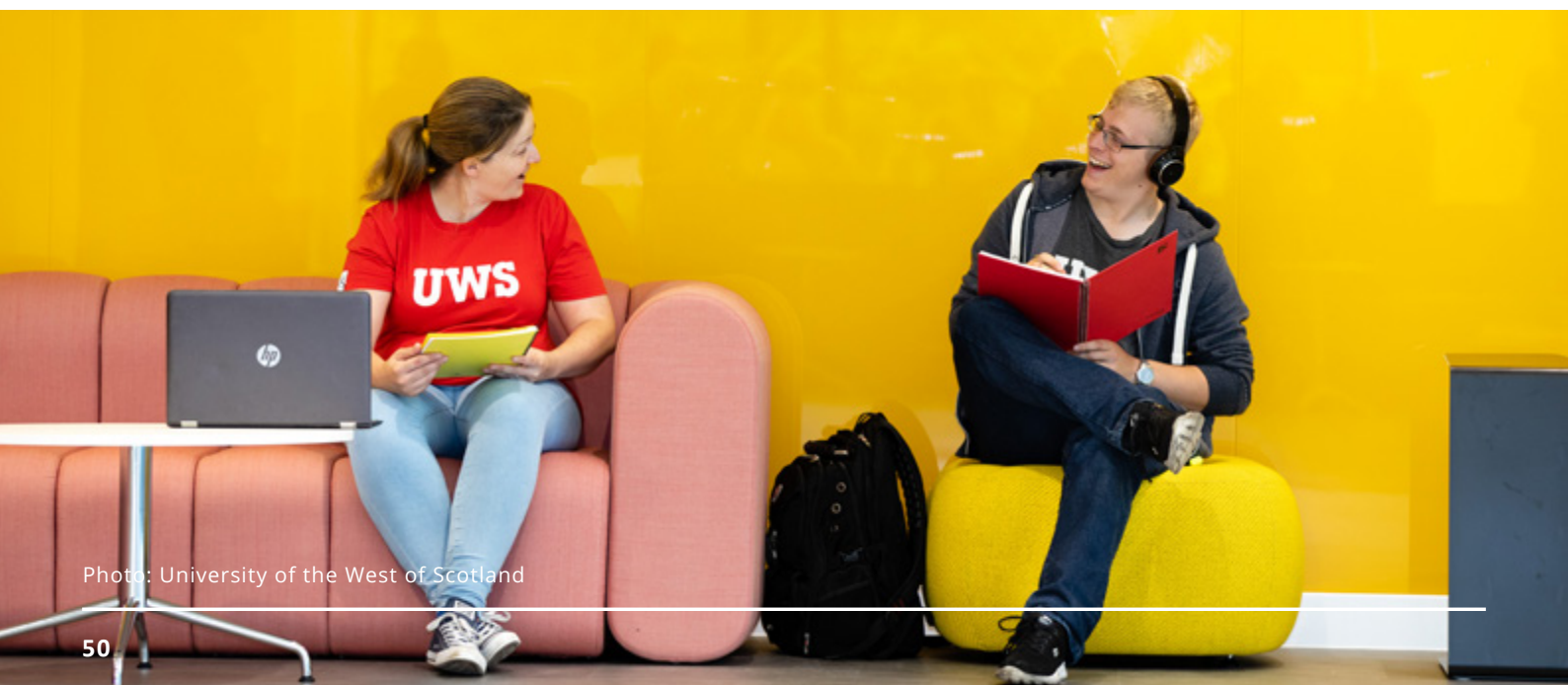


Photo: University of the West of Scotland

Summary and thoughts for the future

The conversations that we had with college and university curriculum and planning experts and leaders during 2023 and 2024, particularly those in the two Pathfinder Regions, and the evidence gathered, suggest that there has been a significant shift in the approach to the curriculum review and planning process. There is also evidence of an increasing focus on the design and delivery of college and university curricula in a post-pandemic world.

A more rigorous review and planning approach is in place, which includes horizon scanning, gathering data and intelligence from a multitude of sources, and at the same time taking account of the insights and expertise that their academic and teaching staff bring.

This curriculum process is central to ensuring the course offer from institutions is responsive and aligned to the demands and needs of employers. We understand that colleges and universities have to balance the decisions they make on their course provision and portfolio with the needs of a range of key stakeholders and groups that are local, regional, national and global. They must also take account of the preferences and choices of learners, and influence as appropriate, particularly through working with Local Authorities and schools.

The evidence we heard through our discussions, and in the exemplars, confirm institutions' responsiveness to emerging regional and national needs and demands, and their development of curriculum in priority areas. The work of curriculum and academic staff is enhanced by strong partnerships and engagement with employers, schools and other key stakeholders.

Institutions consult with their academic and teaching staff to ensure there is capacity to develop curriculum and deliver courses and programmes in response to changing demands. In addition, they create a culture that supports this approach.



Photo: Borders College

The curriculum planning and development processes in place across our colleges and universities are key to ensuring the futureproofing of the curriculum in key priority areas which will benefit learners, employers, and the economy in future. For example, our journey to net zero and the need to focus on a Just Transition and green skills.

Through a range of dedicated teams, committees, and robust validation and assurance processes, colleges and universities have an established and coordinated approach to curriculum planning, to the ongoing management and enhancement of their portfolio of provision, including curriculum and pedagogy, and the evaluation of programme performance and viability.

The evidence that we gathered through discussions, case studies and exemplars signals a renewed focus on the development of curriculum, pedagogy and learning pathways within and between institutions. This has been possible, and is supported by, the shift in the approach to review and planning. Institutions build their aspirations into their strategic plans and ensure there is a focus on culture change to support and deliver.

We have evidence of good practice across these institutions and confirmation that robust curriculum planning and development processes are in place. There is no “gold standard” approach but there is assurance that processes are relevant to the institution and its mission. This evidence provides confidence, assurance and accountability in institutions’ approaches to reviewing, planning and developing their course offer.



At the same time, we recognise there are also challenges in the system that we can collectively work to address. Institutions continue to work within a complex and shifting environment post-Covid, and post-Britain's exit from the EU, and are looking to the potential systems and structural change on the horizon and the potential impact. There is a key role for SFC here in its outcomes and assurance capacity.

Colleges and universities are working diligently and with pace to deliver a workforce for the future with the required knowledge and skills, and with a focus on meeting the needs of priority industry areas. It is a dynamic and complex space but one in which staff in institutions, working with their key stakeholders, approach enthusiastically.

“Everything we do is about education and skills and preparing learners for the real world”

(Senior Manager, University)



Scotland's Wellbeing Economy



NSET

RUK, International/Global

Annex 1 - Six Lenses of Coherent Learning Provision

RUK, International and Global context:

Funding
World Skills
Foreign Policy
Global Climate Emergency
Research and Innovation

NSET Ecological ceiling:

Scotland's nature is protected and restored, and we make a positive contribution to planetary protection

NSET Social Foundation:

Sustainable Development Goals / National Performance Framework

Six Lenses



Regional



Sectoral



National



**Socio-cultural/
Community**



Learner



Institutional

NSET - National Strategy for Economic Transformation | RUK - Rest of the UK



Regional

- Clear approaches to skills and provision planning to meet regional need.
- Engagement with City Regions, Local Authorities and other regional stakeholders.
- Schools, colleges, and universities as partners and providers to meet regional need.
- Ensure skills & education provision aligns with regional demographic challenges, including rural depopulation, urban growth, and ageing populations.



National

- National priorities for the provision of learning and research opportunities are met.
- Systems level governance and funding.
- Engagement with national organisations.
- Impactful continuation to national recovery.
- Mission orientated research.



Learner

- Clarity of opportunity for learners of all ages and stages.
- Clear, coherent and flexible pathways.
- Engagement with learners and a voice in the enhancement of their learner journey.
- An understanding of well-being and support needs and resources



Sectoral

- Employer involvement
- Coherent planning for key sectors of the economy and public services
- Sectoral curriculum planning which makes sense at a national, regional and institutional level.
- Opportunity for work-based learning
- Research/knowledge exchange to support innovation and development.



Socio-cultural / Community

- Socio-cultural role of learning provision for thriving communities
- Alignment with CPPs on place-based policies, and health and socio-economic priorities. Colleges are statutory partners.
- Develop skills and employability strategies alongside Local Employability Partnerships to address regional and local priorities and maximise funding opportunities.
- Support for underrepresented and vulnerable groups through Community Learning and Development partnerships in lifelong skills development.
- Cognisance of community wealth building activity to retain local wealth and reduce inequalities (legislation planned in 2024-2025).
- Utilise role as anchor organisations to leverage local assets to drive economic growth and tackle inequalities.
- Contribution to resilient and sustainable communities through National Planning Framework's 20-minute neighbourhoods.



Institutional

- Institutional sustainability.
- Staff and students as stakeholders.
- Tertiary sector development.
- Schools, colleges, and universities (institutional interests).
- Institutional agency.
- Balance and quality of provision.
- Research and Innovation



Photo: University of Aberdeen

Annex 2 - Key issues emerging from the expert working groups (a series of meetings with key staff from colleges and universities in autumn 2022)

Accessing and using data and intelligence

- Knowing what Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) and intelligence is required and how to access it
- Regional skills landscape – where is the most useful information on current and emerging skills needs and how to ensure a shared understanding
- Complexity of available LMI - there may be conflicting messages
- Timeliness of data (i.e., data can be behind where universities and colleges are in understanding emerging needs/demands)

Responsiveness to emerging skills needs and gaps – balancing competing demands

- Potential for competing demands across local, regional and national geographies and industry sectors
- A range of priority industry sectors including Health and Social Care and Energy
- Rurality – specific issues that require innovative responses

Engaging with employers and industry at different stages of the process

- Role of industry advisory boards in the planning process
- Role of accredited bodies
- Responding to ‘big ticket items’, e.g., City deals, Islands deal, Net zero

Curriculum design and delivery/ Pedagogy

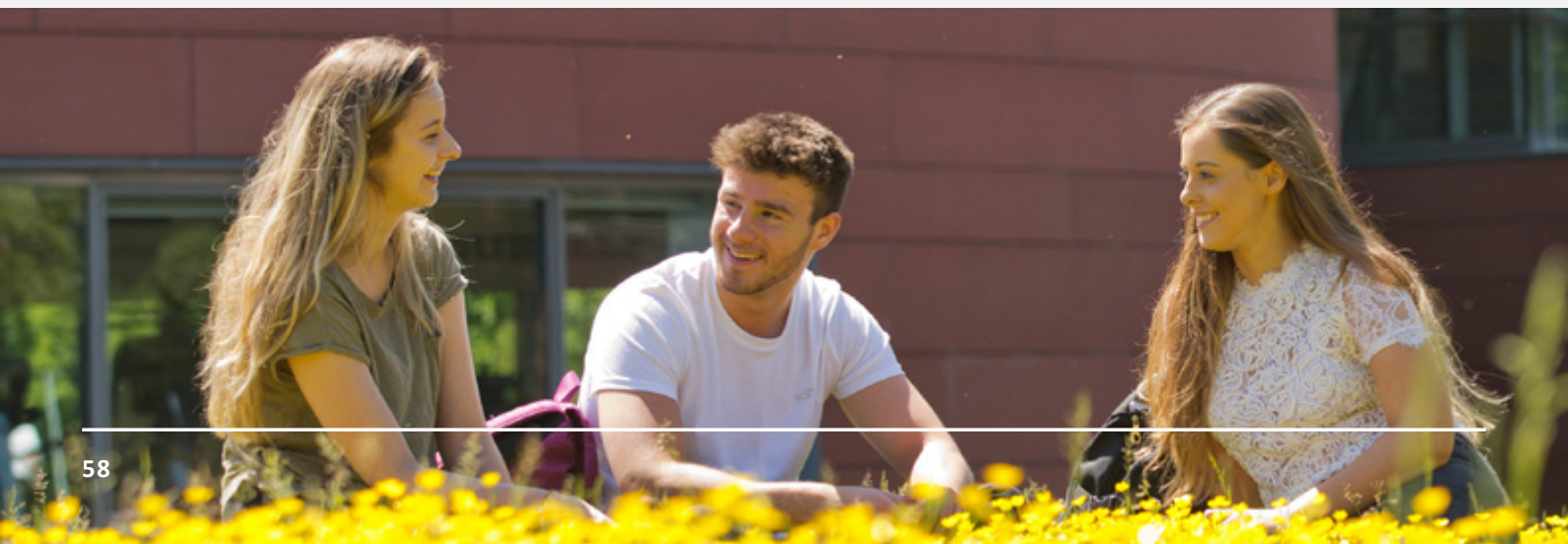
- Modes of delivery
- Micro-credentials
- Meta-skills, graduate attributes
- Multidisciplinary approaches
- Future proofing
- Engaging with students

The importance of Partnerships

- SDS, schools, colleges, communities, institutions, SMEs, SFC, industry bodies
- Understanding and planning for school leavers

Other issues raised

- Matching planning with resources
- Impact of ringfenced funding on flexibility and responsiveness
- Linking with quality arrangements



Annex 3 - Full outline of the Curriculum Planning and Review Process

Strategic Review and Planning (Phase 1)

The strategic review and planning stage is a vital part of the process which provides the evidence base for making key decisions around curriculum, courses and programmes of study in alignment with institutional goals and strategic priorities. During this stage, institutions horizon scan, research and review data and consider insights into emerging skills demand/need. At the same time, they do a demand assessment, taking account of the views and needs of regional stakeholders including employers and students, as well as a wider societal view.

Strategic review is not a one-off activity, and institutions may return to review evidence or consider new, emerging needs at any point in the overall curriculum planning process.

Research, analysis and assessments are undertaken by curriculum teams to understand the needs of students, industry, society, and community to inform the review of programme areas, courses, and modules. This is a structured process within institutions to analyse industry trends and data, informed by insight gathering, regional intelligence, market intelligence, labour market demands, needs and expectations of job markets and regional and national priorities. A range of sources are used, such as Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) data, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and regional skills plans for the region, economic reports relevant to the region and skills reports.

Quality reviews and monitoring, including course reviews, self-evaluations, enhancement plans, and external reports inform the updating, reviewing or development of curriculum areas. This stage is key in the development of new courses and modules, and to review current programmes for any changes given regional and national data, external engagement, and learner feedback.

Stakeholder engagement and consultation are built in at this stage and contribute to an enhanced understanding of local demand, intelligence and needs alongside the national and regional data available (qualitative and quantitative data). Ongoing engagement, input, and feedback from stakeholders (such as learners, schools, employers, industry representatives, professional and accreditation bodies amongst others) inform curriculum design and needs and give insight into local requirements and opportunities. Institutions engage with a range of focus groups, advisory committees/consultations, employers, and school-links that form part of the approach.

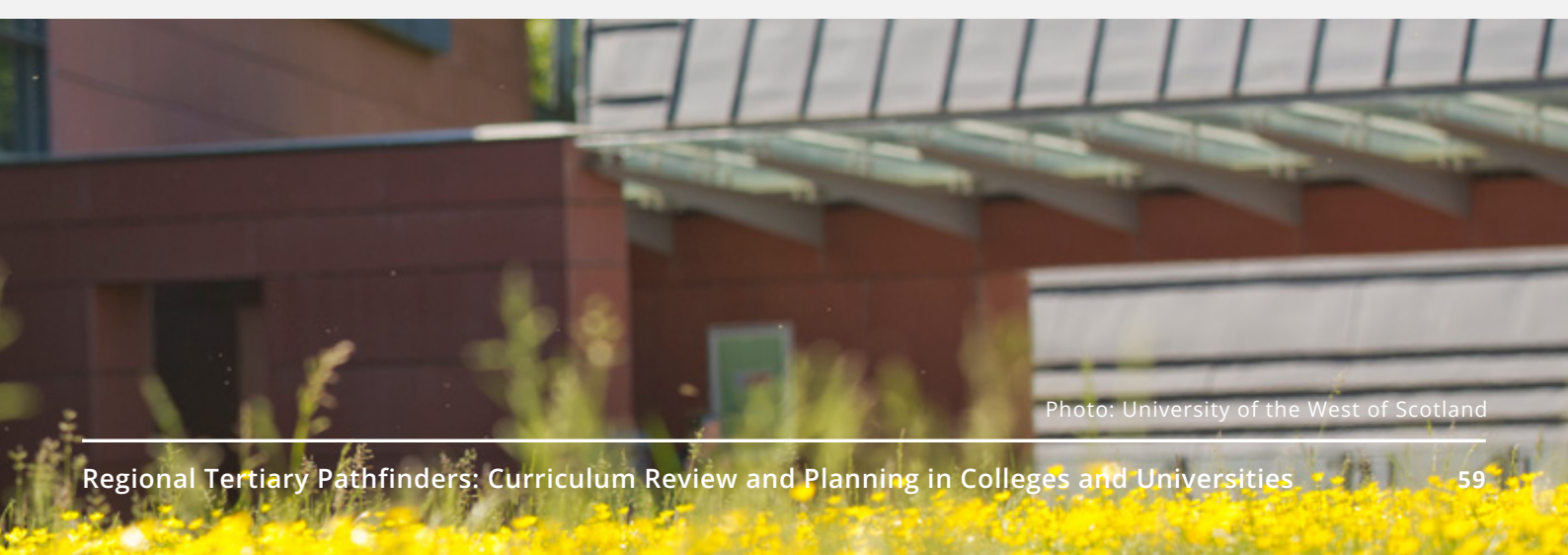


Photo: University of the West of Scotland

Curriculum Development, Approval and Assurance (Phase 2)

Curriculum teams lead on the high-level reviews, design, and development of curriculum plans for programme areas, which are informed by the data, stakeholder engagement and needs analysis, as detailed above. Each subject area designs, reviews or updates the learning outcomes, structure, assessment, needs and development of courses (including topics and modules, resources, materials, and any requirements needed to support delivery).

Planning is aligned to relevant degree and assessment criteria, curriculum frameworks, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmarks, and learning outcomes linked to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies' (PSRB) requirements and progression. As required, accrediting bodies and professional associations ensure assurance and recognition around qualifications as required.

Curriculum plans and proposals for new or amended courses or programmes are usually developed and presented as a business case. Initial proposals are submitted through structured formal curriculum management teams and systems, which then go through a review and approvals process. These formal committees coordinate the approach for ongoing management and enhancement of portfolios and the evaluation of programme performance and viability. They work with and involve other relevant teams and stakeholders – including faculty, academic teams, quality assurance teams, and relevant external agencies for alignment to academic standards and regulatory requirements.

Minor changes to programmes or courses can go through a lighter touch process, whereas any new programme areas (such as new degree awards) need to go through relevant formal approvals aligned to regulations with a longer timeframe.

Individual courses are developed and designed to include detailed objectives, content, methods, and assessment and aligned to professional accreditation where required. Analysis of potential student groups (ie local/national/international etc) and their requirements is undertaken.

Resource allocation happens at this stage, including details on staff requirements, facilities, learning materials and support services required for delivery of the curriculum and specific subject areas. This process includes a cost analysis with central governance and finance teams, and considers recruitment potential, resource implications, resource availability, including from SFC and others, funding constraints, and prioritisation of programmes.

Ongoing collaboration with stakeholders is important at this stage including employers, partners, learners, professional bodies and educational institutions for alignment and relevance of provision, and to ensure feedback and coordination.

Implementation, monitoring, and evaluation

Following the approval of courses, institutions work with their marketing teams to promote and raise awareness of courses and provision. Preparing promotional materials and engagement with local communities and schools form a key part of this process, as does gathering further intelligence and monitor engagement and numbers.

Teams finalise the content, resource, and course requirements (such as IT facilities, equipment, locations etc). Programmes are then set up and teams manage the learner enrolment process, including guidance for registration, course selection and learner support, and continually review and monitor trends and demand.

At this point programmes are entered into the curriculum planning systems, course codes updated, and timetables created in advance of course and programme delivery.

Monitoring, evaluation, and feedback from learners happens throughout delivery and completion of programmes to ensure continuous improvement. This includes for example: PI reviews, annual reports, early experience feedback, analysis of student performance data and surveys, review of recruitment trends and supply and demand. Adjustments are made based on evidence for the improvement of outcomes. This information feeds into the strategic review and planning stage also to inform future provision and planning.



Photo: North East Scotland College

Annex 4 - Summary of key points from the sessions (deep dives) with seven institutions in the Pathfinder Regions

Robert Gordon University (RGU)

- The University has a structured portfolio development process which includes the future of teaching learning and assessment, including graduate attributes, learner engagement, academic staff development and reviewing and monitoring the portfolio.
- Economic data to inform demand is important, with regional profiles considered and national level data being most important to ensure work-based learning and other opportunities to develop graduates able to work across Scotland. Balancing student interest with economic demand is important for bringing courses to market.
- A new set of RGU standards was launched in 2022 to support evaluation of the curriculum, this includes a focus on: assessment and feedback, blended learning, digital learning and academic changes. Impact evaluations are undertaken externally and include staff and student feedback.
- RGU undertook a structured portfolio review of existing course provision in Spring 2022. All 12 academic schools were asked to self-reflect on current and future suitability of their courses using pre-defined criteria. This was in line with their strategic planning.
- New course ideas are developed in two ways: bottom-up with future needs identified and evidenced by academics, and top-down with extensive consumer and economic data to understand demand provided via the inhouse marketing insight team. Primary research is done to assess demand where data isn't available.
- The RGUplus framework was introduced enabling students to capitalise on their full learning experience. This provides opportunities for cross-cutting themes of sustainable development, entrepreneurship and innovation to be built in throughout their courses via work based and community focussed experiences.
- Having a dedicated market insight team is an investment which allows the University to do their analysis in house to identify gaps and opportunities to further develop and address. Market insight information and data can be distilled and disseminated internally to other staff via workshops.
- Getting the right, clear, information to learners about choices via campaigns, school hubs, events and training of front-line staff to engage learners, supports retention and student satisfaction.

North East Scotland College (NESCol)

- The College has an annual timetable to guide the curriculum planning and review process. All aspects of review, and planning for course changes and developments are phased over the planning year. The most recent change to the process was late 2021, with further review underway in AY2024-25.
- The college's offer is reviewed annually through Business Priority Planning, managed by the Associate Vice Principals, and is subject-focused.
- The college described their approach to as top-down and bottom-up. Environmental scanning, economic insights and intelligence is gathered via key stakeholders, including the requirements of the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and balanced with information on internal key performance indicators, including student experience and outcomes, and feedback from staff. This is then utilised to align provision with local, regional and national priorities.
- Flexibility is built into the planning cycle to allow the college to pursue other developments, such as business opportunities. Fast-track proposals will be considered for urgent approvals only (e.g., industry requests, urgent regional needs) and include fast track assessing, reviewing, planning and approval.
- A range of data and intelligence informs curriculum development and ensures the college's sustainability. Regional and local intelligence is key and is used by curriculum teams alongside other sources of data, such as labour market analysis, SDS reports, data from the Chamber of Commerce, Power BI and data reports, learner analysis and evaluation reports and is regularly reviewed and analysed to help inform decision making and planning.
- The college maintains a broad portfolio which allows access and transition. The curriculum planning team is a central team with key roles to look at all aspects of planning – from development, implementation and evaluation, analysis and stakeholder engagement, to forecasting and working with college leadership teams to inform, develop and advise.
- The college is connected into a range of key local and regional forums and groups where local and regional skills needs are discussed and this informs planning. Groups including community planning, local improvement, regional skills planning, DWP, SDS amongst others.
- Engagement in these groups ensures planning of the curriculum is aligned to meet current and emerging needs and considers the key areas identified in the Regional Economic Strategy.
- Employer engagement and college partnerships with stakeholders are key to ensuring an alignment between learning and local jobs available. The college depends on regional partners and the third sector for projects that support community planning. There is an expectation that as part of its public sector responsibility the college will support priority skills areas and the overall strategic direction of the region.
- Ensuring learners are adequately prepared for entry and transition points and ready to move to positive destinations is a key priority for the college. They offer a range of entry points at different levels, cross-curriculum opportunities and clear pathways.

University of Aberdeen

- In 2022, the University developed and aligned their curriculum planning approach to ensure wider strategic alignment across all schools with a market led approach. A range of data, including employer and skills demand, alongside intelligence from stakeholders and employer boards provides intelligence for planning.
- Industry and employer engagement, such as developed in the School of Engineering, ensures responses to industry needs, work-based learning opportunities, guest lectures and case studies, opportunities for learners to work on key projects, and mentorship. This is all possible through the established industry and employer boards and supports future proofing the curriculum and career readiness. These touch points between employers and the University and programme boards supports the planning process.
- Upskilling and reskilling initiatives are developed to be interdisciplinary, respond to market research, and sustainable. Development is led by academic schools and supported by central planning. These can be standalone training, upskilling and reskilling opportunities and can also form part of wider programmes and awards to give flexibility to learners.
- Microcredential style courses are developed to meet ongoing learner and employer demand and offer continuous development through flexible learning opportunities. These are developed through a data and intelligence led approach to curriculum planning.
- Academic portfolio and programme development, overseen by the Programme Management Committee, is designed to align with strategic and academic school plans, embeds a market led approach to programme development, proactively supports the needs of local and national employers, learners, the sector and community.
- The Centre for Academic Development (CAD) was developed to support students and staff across the University in teaching, learning, research, and professional development. CAD works with individuals and groups to tackle issues in these areas, facilitate routes to accreditation, support academic development, support learning strategies for learners and support staff in use of digital/eLearning technologies and accessibility.
- The University's 2040 Strategy shapes the approach to Education with a particular focus on the development of Aberdeen 2040 Graduate Attributes and the University's Skills. These inform the design of curriculum to ensure all degrees offered by the University support students in developing these attributes and skills through their studies. Work is also addressing the embedding of employability related aspects such as work placements within the curriculum to support the future employability of graduates.
- The Interdisciplinary Institute has been established to provide a unified forum to encourage, catalyse, and co-ordinate the University's interdisciplinary research and education initiatives. It also facilitates connections with external partners in policy, industry, and the third sector, thereby enhancing the societal impact of the University's research and innovation efforts.

University of Glasgow

- When planning new provision, the University looks to support the regional economy by aligning to regional and local economic needs taking the University's civic duties in to account, while at the same time balancing national and international priorities and skills requirements. Employers from regional to international and a range of sectors are engaged and working with the University and inform curriculum development.
- A range of data sources combined with market assessment are used to review new programme proposals and support portfolio review processes, including HESA, google analytics and demand on digital education platforms.
- Schools use External Advisory Boards for challenge and, support and depending on the programme, Industry Advisory Boards provide the opportunity for impact and collaboration as well as input to programme design. Regulatory and professional bodies ensure that programmes remain current and meet statutory and regulatory requirements and are an effective engagement process with industry.
- New programmes are proposed in several ways: individual academics based on sector expertise/ from college level considering collaborative programmes; in response to industry engagement; through data led insight and gap analysis; connecting to admissions and recruitment teams.
- The University engaged with regional employers in the design of a new undergraduate degree in 'Creative Arts & Industries'. The design process involved a shift towards considering enhanced learner employability and employer benefit with work-based learning and a programme of guest lectures by local employers integrated in the programme.
- The institution has used their MOOC and microcredential upskilling offer to test new provision and gauge demand. This is a way to de-risk some development, to engage learners and provide pathways into further study in some subject areas.
- Portfolio review occurs at different periodic intervals, some Undergraduate programmes will see more regular revision due to sector focus, eg computing – while all programmes are reviewed on an agreed interval. Timelines for change can be flexible in the event of significant market demand.
- Programme review involves the development and enhancement of existing programmes.
- Skills are embedded in programme design, so that graduates are future proofed for the jobs market and for the future demands of the workplace, this helps mitigate against a narrow focus on specifics of current skills demand (e.g., a particular piece of software) rather building transferable and professional skills in graduates.
- Effective marketing strategies are critical, particularly for new programme offerings in response to sectoral needs. Getting the message right is key.
- Evaluation is a key component of the curriculum development process informing course changes, innovations and adaptations. The Academic Standards Committee (ASC) monitor the results of the central audit in programme evaluations.



Borders College

- A range of data and intelligence are collated to inform the curriculum planning process at Borders College. This includes Regional Skills Assessments (RSA), employment opportunities, articulation opportunities, local Labour Market Intelligence (LMI), national priorities, KPIs, funding, estate and staffing resources.
- A clear understanding of regional skills demand/ requirement is obtained by combining many data sources, both statistical and contextual, and testing these with employer engagement. This ensures that nuance at local spatial level is picked up.
- Their streamlined curriculum planning process includes a rationale and scoring matrix for decision-making. The process ensures both employer and student needs are factored in, while taking account of staff expertise. An action plan is developed to implement the outcomes of curriculum review. This illustrates a top-down, bottom-up approach to curriculum planning.
- Borders College is working with a number of university partners to introduce articulation pathways in particular sectors including nursing/ social care provision,
- They are working with Edinburgh Napier University to enhance the HE offer in the Borders and broaden learner pathways, with a particular focus on engineering. The aim is to retain learners in the region.
- Borders College work with local schools to deliver provision/ courses within their settings and at the college. All schools work together to ensure smooth delivery of these programmes and to align timetables.
- The College has to balance the priorities of national, regional and local skills demands, and in order to deliver a broad curriculum, manage volumes for provision in foundational sectors such as health and social care.
- During programme review, the College has taken the decision to merge courses when demand is low for a critical sector, but to ensure continued provision for employers and students.

SRUC

- SRUC, as a tertiary institution, delivers both FE (SCQF level 6 and below) and HE (SCQF level 7 and above) level programmes, and therefore has developed approaches to curriculum development and quality assurance which span the SCQF.
- SRUC has been on a journey to securing degree awarding powers, now in place, and has undertaken a significant curriculum review and development process. New programmes and provision need to go through two types of external approval processes dependent on the level of study: SQA and Academic Standard Committees of degree validating universities (University of Glasgow (UoG) and University of Edinburgh (UoE)).
- The SEEDABLE (Sustainability, Enterprise, Equality and Diversity, Active and Blended Learning) curriculum framework: A competence-based approach based on ‘knowing, being and acting’, was introduced as the new curriculum review process at SRUC in 2022.
- A new course proposal will be assessed against a number of factors focused on a student centred- industry aligned system including: benefit to learners, programme type and level, future skill requirements, industry needs, method of assessment, stakeholder engagement and equality impact assessed.
- The total time for the programme design process depends on the type of provision. i.e., six months (short, micro) to 18 months (Macro- HNC, HND, Masters).
- The programme review cycle for degree programmes is six years, and changes to programmes are influenced by external factors such as industry and learner requirements, and requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), e.g., regulated provision of veterinary sciences.
- SRUC benefits from a range of employer engagement, industry interaction and insight which serves to inform their curriculum development and provision.
- Annual monitoring process: a single report for each subject with links to different campuses is produced. This is discussed with the relevant strategic board to understand the current situation, changes and challenges.
- Quality enhancement plan for curriculum is based on internal monitoring, audit reports and QAA reports. Institution led review (ILR) is a periodic juncture for reflection, evaluation and focus on future plans and opportunities, where evidence-based analysis of the last five years of activity is used to identify enhancements for student experience and strategic priorities for programmes for the next five years of activity. ILR is conducted ahead of engaging with the sector and includes reviewing all SCQF level provision, engagement with students, thematic reviews, annual reporting for governance and external bodies (University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh as degree validators, SFC etc.) and action planning.
- SRUC is piloting Next Generation HNCs and HNDs, qualifications which have been developed by both external (SQA) and internal expertise working together. These are developed and delivered as standalone qualifications of 15 SQA credits with a focus on Meta-skills, personal development, business and enterprise skills, learning for sustainability throughout the qualification.

Dumfries and Galloway College

- Curriculum review - the college has focused on a major review of its curriculum over the last two years to better meet the needs of the region, employers, students, and other stakeholders. This has included development of specialisms around net zero and digital.
- Curriculum review and planning is a year-round continuous process/cycle and includes a focus on quality provision, pathways, collaboration with partners, innovation bringing in new units to programmes, new qualifications and innovation in pedagogy to ensure a future-focused curriculum that is equipping learners.
- Data and intelligence on skills needs and the economy are key to planning curriculum to meet needs. Existing sources of regional data and intelligence are supplemented via other sources LMI software platforms are used to analyse current vacancy and projected rates alongside conversations with local employers and other key stakeholders to test the data and provide real time information and local/regional insights and nuance.
- The role of Curriculum Managers (CMs) is critical, they respond year-round to demands and requests from employers and other stakeholders while working to annual allocations of funding and delivery targets. CMs meet with their line managers to review performance and assess proposed curriculum changes.
- Responding to rurality is key, and there are different demands east and west of the region, including meeting the needs of SMEs. In addition, the College needs to continually look to opportunity sectors emerging/sustainability sectors balanced against delivery of stability provision (e.g., high demand) to ensure sustainability.
- The College's curriculum review and planning processes are not well understood by regional partners and stakeholders. Employers can often expect an immediate response to identified skills needs in the region – if there is not something to 'lift off the shelf' and deliver immediately then this may be interpreted as a lack of responsiveness. And there are resource implications of developing new provision.
- The College staff reach out to schools and those that influence pupil choice to raise awareness about the careers available and pathways to gain the appropriate qualifications and skills. They continually look at how to match pupil interest and demand with what employers are looking for. The College looks to awarding bodies to be agile and responsive in this process.
- There is a busy skills landscape that can make joint planning and collaboration challenging. The College propose a systems approach to the skills and education landscape in the region.
- The College works closely with employers and has developed innovative provision with Natural Power in renewables. Place-based solutions are required for the Stranraer area of the region which involves Dumfries & Galloway College as an active partner. Engagement with local economic partners through the Local Employability Partnership is considered a vital component to meeting regional employability demands.





Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

Apex 2 - 97 Haymarket Terrace

Edinburgh - EH12 5HD

T 0131 313 6500 - F 0131 313 6501

www.sfc.ac.uk