

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

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### **Students' Association**

It is imperative that the Scottish Funding Council ensures within its own review and in further and higher education institutions in Scotland that there is a genuine involvement of student representative bodies throughout all decision making. Brexit and the Coronavirus will have a significant impact on the student experience on campuses and for learners across Scotland and therefore it is more important than ever that the student voice is heard.

A strength of the Scottish Higher Education system is the Quality Enhancement Framework with student engagement as one of its five elements. Since the inception of the enhancement-led approach, it has become established practice that students should be partners in the formulation, operation and evaluation of the institution's approach to enhancement.

The Scottish Funding Council and our institutions must ensure that Students' Associations are properly resourced, whether directly from the institution or directly from the Scottish Funding Council. Students' Associations play a crucial role in ensuring a high quality learning experience through a strong student voice, extra-curricular activities that enhance the student experience and enhanced employability opportunities as well as creating a sense of belonging and community, which will be increasingly important with Brexit and the Coronavirus outbreak. The Scottish Funding Council, working with NUS Scotland, could provide opportunities for partnership and collaborative working between institutions and Students' Associations both within further and higher education. The Scottish Funding Council for example could directly support initiatives such as the NUS Quality Students' Unions accreditation.

Institutions must work in partnership with Students' Associations in all conversations on their future strategies in responding to Brexit and the Coronavirus outbreak. This should include all aspects that directly or indirectly have an impact on the student experience and the sustainability of the institution. Particular focus should be given to the institutions approach to online and blended learning and on the financial sustainability of the institution. The Scottish Funding Council have a role to ensure this happens across all institutions, for example through the Outcome Agreements and through stronger guidance for the sector.

NUS Scotland is the representative body of students in Scotland. The role of sparqs should be better clarified in responding to consultations as it does not represent the views of students but of itself as a sector organisation.

### **Sustainable Public Investment**

We need to see an increase in public investment and adequate funding for FE and HE in Scotland to support the reduced numbers of international and EU students and the reduced ability of institutions to secure other income. The Scottish Government should rule out fees for Undergraduate students given the financial pressures our students are facing already due to Covid-19.

## **Protecting Teaching, Courses and Support Services**

It is vital to ensure the Scottish further and higher education sector is efficiently resourced to provide a world leading high quality student experience. Encouraging institutions to incorporate the SDG's and the Scottish Future Skills Action Plan is imperative. Recognising that funding for learning and teaching is important but also that there will be sufficient funding for support services. Mental Health, Responding and Preventing Gender Based Violence are examples of initiatives that should continue to receive funding and prominence.

## **Welcoming Our International Students**

In a driven global market, the Scottish Government must ensure that international students are welcomed to Scotland as an affordable place to study, live and work. International students positively contribute immeasurably to our society and to our communities. The Scottish Government should be encouraged to push for more competitive post work study visas beyond two years and to further look at easing restrictions.

As EU students will now be charged tuition fees the SFC must put together a way to support our home students studying in the EU and in becoming global citizens and ambassadors for Scotland.

## **Adequate Cost-Of-Living Support for Scotland's Students**

Although welcomed that the Scottish Government has provided over £16 million for emergency hardship funds and summer support and £5 million package of support to address digital poverty there needs to be a package of support for our students who have no financial support going forward, especially students from SIMD20 zones, to ensure no student studying in Scotland faces destitution.

The concerns that students will be unable to obtain part time work because of the damage to our economy by COVID-19 or have the means to attend university, thus widening the gap for education for students from these backgrounds, means that financial support is vital and should be put in place before the new academic year begins.

## **Widening Access in Scotland's Institutions**

We welcome that Scotland's universities have committed to ensuring that Covid-19 does not derail further progress in widening access, however this needs financial commitment to address issues such as digital poverty from the Scottish Government so that support is available for our universities and students.

## **Support for Graduates**

The contracted job market due to COVID-19 means reduced opportunities for graduates therefore the Scottish Government and our institutions must make a commitment in supporting graduates from 2020 and beyond in way of lifelong learning to update knowledge and skills and by providing financial support for students of all ages while re-skilling.

## **The Learner Journey**

Post COVID-19 the learner should have more routes into education, such as through different modes of study or personalised learning. The pathways and articulation route from college to university must be expanded and developed and the opportunities for apprenticeships should more than ever be encouraged with employers. This route is also vital for mature students wanting to re-skill and change careers due to downturn of the economy and job losses. Examples of good practice like the

Advanced Higher Hub at GCU should be a focus for the SFC, thus ensuring collaborative working, meeting identified needs and efficiency of resources.

### **Quality of the Student Learning Experience**

It is crucial that the place of student voice is protected and we must maintain the Quality Enhancement Framework for universities while improving issues such as the Black Attainment Gap and gender imbalances.

We need to ensure that the right data is reviewed and gathered to ensure adequate progression and institutional performance and to enhance the quality of the student experience and ensure equalities in the institutions Key Performance Indicators.