



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

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

SFC Call for Information

Issue Date: 20 July 2020

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

1. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is the national, strategic body that funds further and higher education, and research, in Scotland. We have been asked by Scottish Ministers to review how best we can fulfil our mission of securing coherent provision by post-16 education bodies, and the undertaking of research, in these changing times. A [briefing note on the review](#) can be found on the SFC website.
2. We invite all interested individuals and organisations to submit evidence to help inform and shape our review. We particularly welcome responses from colleges and universities, students and learners, graduates, industry and employers, local government, equalities interests, unions, quality assessors, other SFC funded bodies, professional representative bodies and academies. Annex A lists the key stakeholders we anticipate will be interested in responding to this call for evidence.
3. It would be helpful if you could provide succinct submissions by **10 August 2020**. We would welcome evidence and data that supports your view. You may choose to respond to any aspect of this review; and any or all of the specific questions we pose, as we recognise the inter-connectedness of many of the themes. Please complete the attached respondent information form (Annex B) when submitting your response.
4. This will not be your only opportunity to contribute to our review. We are planning to undertake the review in a number of phases and to elicit views in different ways, including further calls for evidence. We anticipate that responding organisations will wish to provide additional input and evolving views as the review progresses.
5. In this first phase of our review we are interested in your views on these six areas in particular:
 - a) What do you think works well in the current further and higher education arrangements that we should keep in order to secure Scotland's inclusive social and economic recovery from the current pandemic? How can we best preserve and strengthen those features of education, research and innovation in Scotland that we most prize, in a very challenging funding environment?

Scotland has an advanced higher education system and has made efforts above and beyond other regions within the UK to foster interdisciplinary collaborative research by bringing partners together, for example in the Pooling initiative to which the Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance belongs. SULSA has leveraged over £400million for the life sciences sector, led to the creation of new consortia and supported facilities which have nurtured Scotland's international reputation.

Having a body whose predominant purpose is facilitating cross-institutional collaboration and driving interdisciplinary research not only lessens the burden on Universities but also, provides an

impartial voice to work toward goals for the greater good; for societal and economic recovery. The structure enables growth clusters to be identified and nurtured and also supports those Universities with less resources but alternative and innovative research and learning models, which drive integration of R&D between industry and academia.

We should be building on the research and innovation ecosystem that exists (in our Pools, ICs, Interface and other Research and Technology Organisations) and enable these institutions to unlock their full potential. By creating better synergy around these institutions in a top-down led initiative, these institutions can be more adaptable and proactive to the challenges that arise, bringing the right people together at the right time to drive change.

- b) What do you think colleges, universities and specialist institutions should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery? (You may wish to comment on teaching and skills development, sectoral and employer needs and employability, research, innovation and knowledge exchange, widening access and equalities issues.)

A coherent review of Scotland's industrial base, including thoughts as how the nation can best use its natural and human resources to promote economic recovery, is required. Higher education establishments need to work more closely with external bodies such as SDS and the R&I network to better understand where the skills shortages lie and be adaptable to respond to the challenges in the pipeline as they arise. SULSA is working with SDS and the ICs to deliver employability workshops to 11 Scottish Universities in 2021 however, these are not currently part of the curriculum and are run with minimal resources from all sides. There are opportunities for such courses to be delivered universally across the HE sector, but the organisations positioned to do this, such as SULSA, need to exist and be sufficiently supported to be able to facilitate these.

There is momentum around reducing inequality and widening access for people from poorer backgrounds and from BAME communities that we should be capitalising on. For example providing calls such as that given by the PHE, OfS and UKRI on [Reducing inequality in higher education](#) that can harness this enthusiasm and fund projects that make can make long-term change and lessen the impact of COVID-19 on the social divide.

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

Enhanced education and supporting research in key areas that can be predicted to be fundamental to the economic recovery e.g. in Information technology, onshore manufacturing, bioengineering, environmental sciences and sustainability. A unified approach is needed to develop these fundamental areas and to attract talent from overseas to come to Scotland and to work and trade with us. We should focus on specific challenges that will be critical to the recovery and the production of strategic partnerships with international research groupings, where preferential partnerships may be supported to build levels of cooperation and trust that lead to increased critical mass in addressing key challenges e.g. the [Lower Saxony Alliance of Science and Culture](#). Presenting our researchers as a whole, not defined by institutional boundaries, is a unique strength for Scotland, one which has been replicated by other nations, and exposes us to new opportunities

for international collaboration and boosts our reputation on the global stage. An example of this is the First Minister's visit to India, in which SULSA was represented.

There will be an understandable hesitation to support international travel with both the pandemic and Brexit, which means there is even more cause to fund it as it will certainly diminish. We want to present Scotland as a welcoming nation and one which wants to strengthen ties with our global partners. Schemes such as PECRE should be encouraged and invested in to continue to deliver the enormous benefit to our researchers as before. Furthermore, should ODA related funding schemes, like the Newton fund, which are under review and directed at supporting DAC list countries, be expanded rather than constricted? The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the interconnectivity of research as a global community that contributes rather than takes away from all society, which leads us to believe there needs to be much more of an international focus for Universities in Scotland, rather than any inward-looking activity.

- d) What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges, universities and specialist institutions? For institutional leaders, how are you planning to address these challenges and opportunities?

Threats include loss of revenue from classical teaching models should University teaching move increasingly online and away from bringing large student bodies together. The absence of a physical campus will have a broad impact and we should be wary that the practical and social skills usually gained are not lost. The connectivity between Universities, and therefore the structures that unite them, are vital in tackling this for example in sharing good practice for new learning models and even potentially in sharing some teaching resources to reduce the burden on lecturers, enabling them to focus on research activities. There are opportunities here to expose students to international speakers and research as we have become more efficient and comfortable with virtual meetings. This is something the R&I network is capitalising on, delivering seminars and workshops from speakers from across the world.

There will of course be a general loss of research funding as the economy struggles to support numerous sectors that have collapsed due to the pandemic. The diversion of research funding into tightly focused areas e.g. Covid19 research at the expense of other key areas that will underpin growth e.g. precision medicine, environmental science and innovative engineering, will have a significant impact. SULSA aims to fund key areas that may have suffered due to this diversion of funds but that have become ever more important as the ripple effect of the pandemic is seen, for example in brain health (healthy ageing) and in natural products and the Bioeconomy (drug development and onshore manufacturing).

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

Aligning Academic research, education and innovation ever more closely with industrial requirements. Increasing cross-institutional and interdisciplinary research by creating funding streams that promote such interactions e.g. cross institutional research training programmes with industrial and academic partners.

A more unified response to Career Personal Development across institutions from College to University level would reduce the administrative burden on individual institutions and foster cross-

fertilisation across the institutions. Better synergy across the education and research ecosystem would enable this.

- f) How can SFC, alongside government and other enterprise, skills and education-focused agencies, best support colleges, universities and specialist institutions to make their full contribution to Scotland's inclusive, green and education-led recovery? In particular, you may wish to draw out:
- How scarce public resources should be prioritised to drive recovery
 - Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions
 - Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery
 - How SFC's funding and accountability frameworks should ensure that equality and wide access to educational opportunity are promoted as key elements of the recovery for younger people and adults
 - What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment

The SFC should take advantage of the research and innovation ecosystem it has created, through the research pooling and innovation centre initiatives, to build a coherent network of connections where interdisciplinary teams can be identified and created to address the challenges created by the pandemic and its aftermath. As an example, being well positioned to compete for the potential investment from the UK government in transformative, ambitious and disruptive research. Along with our colleagues in other Research Pools we would welcome a Government led strategic initiative to pull the Innovation Ecosystem together, with the SFC charged with ensuring that the academic base aligns and underpins it. Work is already underway across the R&I network to better promote our interdisciplinary working and more closely interweave our institutions to accelerate innovative interdisciplinary research in Scotland.

Doctoral training programmes that link academia and industry are needed, with clear requirements on the scope of projects and how training will contribute to the economy. Further to this, a linked funding scheme to enable the best early career researchers emerging from these programmes (and starting before completion of these bespoke programmes) to develop their careers in a University setting, with programmes of research directly linked to industrial partners. This would be most successful with industrial partners providing match funding to support such projects.

Ensuring wider access starts at a young age, to be able to really tackle these issues Public Engagement needs to be seen as less of a tick box exercise and more of a response to rebuild our economy, to train up the talented workforce that is needed. Universities, Colleges and associated bodies have an important part to play in this. Furthermore, there is also a need for upskilling and a responsibility for Universities, together with industry, to better support the researchers who are unsuccessful at fellowship level and may drop off from the system all together.

6. Please send your response or any queries to reviewsecretariat@sfc.ac.uk by **10 August 2020**. We look forward to receiving your views.

SFC Review Secretariat
July 2020

Stakeholders likely to be interested in responding

- Colleges, universities, specialist institutions (and their representative bodies) and other funded bodies
- UK counterparts
- Audit Scotland, Education Scotland and QAA
- Enterprise & Skills Strategic Board and agencies
- NUS, sparqs, student bodies, learners, SAAS
- Employers and industry
- NHS
- RSE
- Cultural bodies
- Trade Unions
- EHRC and equality interests
- Local Authorities and Scottish Cities Alliance
- Expert advisers, e.g. Chief Scientific Adviser
- Development bodies, e.g. College Development Network (CDN), Advance HE
- Community and adult learning

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

Issue date: 20 July 2020

Deadline: 10 August 2020

Reference: SFC/CE/01/2020

Summary: This publication invites all interested individuals and organisations to submit evidences to help inform the SFC review of coherent provision and sustainability in Further and Higher Education.

FAO: Colleges and universities, students and learners, graduates, industry and employers, local government, equalities interest groups, unions, quality assessors, other SFC funded bodies, professional representative bodies and academies

Further information: **Contact:** Review Secretariat
Email: reviewsecretariat@sfc.ac.uk