



Report by the Principal, West College Scotland

Management Group: 19 November 2020

Subject: Review of Scotland's Colleges & Universities- Phase One Report

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the phase one report of the Scottish Funding Council report on coherence and sustainability in further and higher education.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 CPWD is asked to note the findings of the report and consider any relevance to local DIG action plans

3. Background

- 3.1 A review of tertiary education is currently being undertaken by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) at the request of Government Ministers.

The initial Review objectives are:

- To consider how best to achieve coherence and sustainability in the delivery of tertiary education during the COVID-19 crisis, EU exit transition, and beyond, while maintaining and enhancing quality.
- To propose changes needed to SFC's funding, operations and accountability frameworks in order to respond effectively to new challenges and opportunities.
- To ensure the sector can address the outcomes we need to achieve in Scotland.
- To provide advice, where appropriate, to Scottish Ministers on relevant changes to policy, funding and accountability frameworks for tertiary education and research in Scotland.

The review consultation set out that it provided an opportunity for everyone interested in the education, skills, research and innovation delivered through

colleges and universities, and for post-16 provision generally in Scotland, to consider what the future could or should look like.

- 3.2** The Phase 1 report '**Insights to develop further**' was published on 20 October feeding back the research and consultation responses and identifying possible areas for further review and collaborative next steps.

Phase 2 is due in February (it is not confirmed if this will be in the form of a report at this stage) and the review to be completed early summer 2021.

- 3.3** The Phase 1 report highlights the significant challenges COVID presents for tertiary education in terms of learning (particularly in practical areas); financial sustainability; pressures on public spending; the pace of technological change and the expectations on the sector post COVID.
- 3.4** Included in the Phase 1 report is the summary of the consultation findings, some extracts from the responses and the research documentation considered.
- 3.5** There are no final outcomes at this stage or any timetable for changes but there are clear areas for further exploration within the next Phases.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** From the feedback received, the report highlights that the most striking response was the expression of immense pride in our world-leading education and research system and that our colleges, universities and specialist institutions are major national assets that have significant social, economic and cultural impact.
- 4.2** This first phase review demonstrates a real appetite to consider change, whilst recognising:
- We are working at two speeds: responding to the immediate pandemic, alongside securing an adaptable and resilient sector for the future that delivers optimal outcomes.
 - We need to take a whole-system view, working across the education and skills system.
 - Colleges and universities are making rapid adjustments to deal with this emergency. More profound changes that affect students, curriculum delivery, financial and business models, or physical estates in different states of adaptability will need longer term transition and adaptation.
 - We will get the best outcomes if we collaborate for change - colleges, universities, students, employers and key interests - in an iterative way, to shape the conversation and bring forward and explore options for the future.

4.3 10 themes were identified for the next Phase of review and are summarised below:

Theme 1: Keeping the interests of current and future students, and equalities, at the heart of everything we do.

Theme 2: Supporting the digital revolution for learners recognising that excellent digital learning delivery is now essential for every institution.

Theme 3: Towards an integrated, connected tertiary education and skills system for learners and employers. Widening access and the existing articulation routes and partnerships between colleges and universities to make an integrated tertiary system a reality:

- Articulating the **distinctive roles** of colleges and universities, and the differentiation, while incentivising closer collaboration.
- Examining options with the **senior phase** of school in terms of duplication, connections, transitions and funding overlaps with tertiary education; and working closely with the OECD review of the Curriculum for Excellence which includes the senior phase.
- Safeguarding **widening access** for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and creating **pathways** for learners between qualifications and institutions.
- Supporting flexible entry and certificated exit points, along with **“stackable” qualifications and micro-credentials** with currency across providers.
- Prioritising efficient **regional planning and skills alignment** through better labour market intelligence and enabling local decision-makers to adjust provision to respond more flexibly to local, regional and national economic needs.
- **Improved information, advice and guidance** to help learners better navigate their qualification choice and progression routes to college, university, apprenticeship or directly into employment.
- Exploring how **a fully integrated tertiary funding model by SCQF level and whole system targets and outcomes** might support closer collaboration, more efficient learner journeys, and more equitable approaches to funding.

Theme 4: Recognising colleges and universities as national assets and civic anchors for their significant contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of Scotland, promoting their impact and embedding them into regional plans.

Theme 5: Building long-term relationships with employers and industry supporting the alignment of skills with employers' current and future needs. Prioritising and safeguarding apprenticeships through longer term investment and planning, an extended range of courses, and greater flexibility between apprenticeship programmes and with other qualifications.

Theme 6: Protecting and leveraging the excellence of our research and science base.

Theme 7: Driving the innovation agenda a focus on place and the benefits of regional collaborations with industry; and bringing colleges more fully into innovation partnerships and the national innovation agenda.

Theme 8: Enhancing collaboration around pathways for learners, procurement and shared services, and by exploring different organisational partnerships and models.

Theme 9: Making the most of the sector's global connections,

Theme 10: Focusing on the financial sustainability of colleges and universities, and current funding models, incentivising collaboration, and working towards a more integrated, differentiated, connected tertiary education and skills system

- 4.4** The report highlights what are called the two emergency years ahead, alongside considering how to build a system for the future that is adaptable and resilient, to secure optimal outcomes for a wide range of interests in a shifting and complex environment.

The report identifies areas where further exploration is required in the next phase.

- One tertiary education budget, to enable greater flexibility for investment. *(currently SFC manages the funding for both Colleges and Universities but through separate budgets)*
- Moving away from activity targets towards participation indicators and demographic modelling.
- An SCQF-based tertiary funding model and simplified premiums that take account of access and inclusion objectives, an institution's context, and successful student outcomes.
- Develop options with SDS to embed Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeship programmes into SFC's funding and accountability frameworks.
- A Transformation Investment Fund to support change in the sector.
- A new National Outcome and Impact Framework for colleges and universities, as a reset of the Outcome Agreement process.
- Generating better debate about the future of tertiary education and skills through evaluative research, good engagement with students, employers, and key stakeholders, and development of better data analytics.

Key areas for development in Phase 2 will include:

- A continued focused response to the COVID-19 pandemic,

- Engagement with employers and industry to ensure their views and expertise help inform and improve student outcomes.
- Exploring the collective enhancement and support for digital and blended learning.
- Developing further SFC's outcome and impact framework, funding methodologies, quality assurance arrangements, options for targets and measures, and a Transformation Fund.
- Establishing a student advisory group to ensure student views are incorporated.

4.5 The detail within the 10 themes and the options set out in the report with regards to possible changes to tertiary education funding methodology, quality assurance and measurement reporting are of specific interest to Universities and Colleges.

There are some topics such as research and global connections which are of primary interest to the University sector. There are also suggestions as to next steps for governance for multi-college regions which does not apply for the West Region, although there could be an impact through changes to Glasgow.

The report states that there will not be one simple answer to the challenges and there are many stakeholders who will influence how best to respond to the consequences of the pandemic and other long-run issues within the sector. The report highlights that in order to get the best outcomes for change there should be collaboration - colleges, universities, students, employers, and other key stakeholders working together, in an iterative way, to shape the conversation, bring forward and explore options, and consider necessary reforms at a system-wide level.

At this stage the report content is mainly for CPWD awareness raising and updates can be provided after the conclusion of the final phases.

Areas of interest for the CPWD may include aspects around - digital learning; integrated learning pathways; collaborative place-based hubs or clusters, reducing duplication including with the senior phase; widening access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds; regional planning and skills alignment to meet regional economic and employer needs; regional collaborations with industry; improved advice and guidance for students and supporting the College in any application to the Transition Investment Fund, should this be considered an option once more details are known.

5. People Implications

5.1 None

6. Financial Implications

6.1 None

7. Risk Analysis

7.1

8. Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

8.1

9. Consultation

9.1

10. Strategic Assessment

10.1

Person to Contact: Liz Connolly, Principal and Chief Executive

Appendices:

Background Papers: The full report is available on the SFC website
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/corporatepublications_sfccp052020/Review_of_Coherent_Provision_and_Sustainability_Phase_1_Report.pdf

Wards Affected: