

The 123rd meeting of the Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council was held on Thursday 12 November 2020 at 10.00am, by video-conferencing.

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

Scottish
Government: Dr Linda Pooley

Observers: Matt Crilly (President of NUS (Scotland))
Cliona O'Neill (HEFCW)

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

Apologies: None

20/77 Welcome

The Chair welcomed Cliona O’Neill from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and all present.

20/78 Chair’s business: declarations of interest

The Chair invited members to indicate if they wished to discuss any of the starred items on the agenda. The recommendations contained within paper SFC/20/51 were **agreed** without discussion

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

The following members noted a potential conflict of interest:

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

20/79 Minute of the 24 September 2020 meeting (SFC/20/Min06)

The minute of the 24 September 2020 was **confirmed** as a true record of the meeting.

20/80 Action Tracker (SFC/20/47)

The Council received an update on the actions from previous meetings of the Board.

20/81 Chief Executive's Report (SFC/20/48)

The Council received a paper providing a report from the Chief Executive on current operational issues.

In discussion the Council:

- Noted that future Council board meeting dates would need to be amended to allow for the revised Scottish Government budget timetable.
- Recognised that SFC and tertiary institutions were facing multi-dimensional pressures arising directly or indirectly from COVID-19. In particular, that student retention was a specific risk, and that was being monitored carefully.
- Commented on the positive role that tertiary institutions could play in supporting recovery, but also noted that they would need adequate resources for that work.

20/82 Review of coherent provision and sustainability

The Council received a presentation setting out the progress with the Review of coherent provision and sustainability.

The Council noted the positive progress and covered the following points in discussion.

- An appropriate balance needs to be struck between recognising the inter-connectedness across the broad range of fields in which colleges and universities are involved and prioritising the most significant aspects of our review.
- The emphasis on engagement with business and community development was welcomed, as was the planned work on research and innovation.
- If there are a series of outputs from Phase 2, it will be necessary to maintain consistency in the areas of overlap.
- A key potential constraint on the speed of progress with Phase 2 would be the capacity of stakeholders to engage and respond.

The Council **endorsed** the approach to Phase 2 set out in the presentation.

20/83 Presentation from the Principals of North-East Scotland College and Robert Gordon University

Neil Cowie (Principal and Chief Executive, North East Scotland College) and Professor Steve Olivier (Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Robert Gordon University) joined the meeting.

The Council received a presentation from the two principals on the intention of Robert Gordon University and North-East Scotland College to develop a joint, tertiary partnership for the delivery of education and skills in the north-east.

On behalf of the Council, the Chair thanked Neil Cowie and Steve Olivier for their extremely interesting presentation.

Neil Cowie and Professor Steve Olivier left the meeting.

20/84 Equalities and diversity update (SFC/20/49)

The Council received an update on activity to advance equality, tackle inequalities, and ensure continued compliance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Act (PSED).

The Council recognised that it had been necessary to adapt the approach due to the current circumstances, but emphasised the vital importance of making progress, including in relation to gender inequalities at the subject level.

20/85 SFC governance (SFC/20/50)

The Council received a paper on various corporate governance issues, noting both: proposals for the next review of Board effectiveness and for Board member development; and the Scottish Government's consultation on changes to the Model Code of Conduct for members of devolved public bodies.

The Council **approved**:

- A change in the Standing Orders of the Remuneration Committee; and
- A minor change to the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

20/86 Remuneration Committee minutes (SFC/20/51)

The Council noted the unconfirmed minutes of the Remuneration Committee meeting of 4 September 2020.

20/87 Long-term agenda (SFC/20/52)

The Council received a paper informing members of substantive agenda items proposed for future meetings.

20/88 Any other business (Oral)

There was no other business

20/89 Next meeting: 17 December 2020