QAA Scotland submission by Rowena Pelik, Director of QAA Scotland

We value the shared vision for quality established and championed by SFC, with its clear focus on partnership, collaboration, quality enhancement and on students and their learning.

SFC has helped to establish and maintain a strong partnership between itself as the funding body, ourselves as the independent Quality Assurance Agency, the universities' representative body (Universities Scotland) and NUS Scotland. We value the fact that we can readily talk directly with the CEO or the Chair of SFC's Board as well as with the SFC officers we work with more directly. We value the good working relationships we have. SFC has provided good strategic leadership and set a direction to meet longer term, not merely immediate, goals - such as collaboration through research pooling, or through its approach to innovation with the innovation centres; or, in the FE sector, re-focusing provision on employment demand/economic and social need and away from supply-side or student-led demand. This has enabled more to be achieved, created a stability through the consistency of vision and has been led with sufficient strength (including through the power of financial allocations and incentives) to weather resistance, challenge and doubters.

Given the constrained nature of funding SFC has in general made overall sound funding decisions - although each aspect of the post-compulsory learning environment, research and innovation would all benefit from greater investment (as would QAA Scotland in the work it undertakes for SFC). The introduction of Outcome Agreements has helped ensure that providers are focusing on national and strategic measures, has enabled constructive challenge about progress and ambition. Funding pressures are unlikely to ease and continued clear leadership with strategic vision will be even more important.

With the importance of learners, leaning and the enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience for the HE sector, and for ourselves as an agency concerned with these areas, we would value greater visibility of the strategic engagement with and discussion of these areas. We have very good engagement with individual officers but it can be hard to see how the Council engages with these areas more broadly. The Skills Committee clearly touches on aspects but skills is a particular lens and goes not cover the full breadth of nature of learning nor quality enhancement. The focus on Skills does not always enable some of the surrounding work to be joined up - such as the quality assurance of Degree Apprenticeships in a way that ensures no additional burden for HEIs, fit with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education etc. Given SFC's strategic vison refers to the best place in the world to learn as well as to innovate and research, learning seems to have less
visibility than the other ambitions in the way in which the Council considers its business.

I have endeavoured to keep this brief and high level. If you have questions or would like to discuss anything further, please do get in touch.

Best wishes,

Rowena

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Nations and International