

# Cross-Party Group on Colleges and Universities

Thursday 3 April 2025 1pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP

Audrey Nicoll MSP

Michael Marra MSP

Invited guests

1. Francesca Osowska, Chief Executive, Scottish Funding Council

Non-MSP Group Members

Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland

Fiona Stewart, Skills Development Scotland

Frances Johnston, University of Edinburgh

Professor Gareth Miles, University of St Andrews

Grant Jarvie, University of Edinburgh

Heather Rattray, Interface Online

Jason Miles-Campbell, Jisc

Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland

Katy Wilson, Audit Scotland

Keith Robson, Open University in Scotland

Lauren Wards, Universities Scotland

Lynne Raeside, Scottish Funding Council

Matthew MacIver

Paula Dixom, EIS

Rachel Currie, NUS Scotland

Rachel Treglown, Universities Scotland

Ray Buist, Audit Scotland

Roy Gardner, City of Glasgow College

Stuart Tooley, University of Edinburgh

Susannah Lane, Universities Scotland

Thomas Feige, Edinburgh Napier University

Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland

Ulrike Peter, Universities Scotland  
Ursla Lodge, Scottish Funding Council  
William Hardie, Robert Gordon University

## Apologies

Garry Ross, EIS  
Jane Scott, Queen Margaret University  
Professor John Blicharski, University of Dundee  
Judith McClure  
Dr Paul Little, City of Glasgow College  
Sarah Collins, EIS  
Suzy Powell, Interface Online

## Welcome and Introduction

Ms Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting in the Scottish Parliament and introduced the topic of the meeting, an overview from Francesca Osowska, the newly appointed Chief Executive of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

## Presentations

### **Francesca Osowska, the newly appointed Chief Executive of the Scottish Funding Council:**

- Francesca began her presentation by introducing herself, including a brief overview of her career to date, the functions of the SFC and outlining what she sees as the priorities for the SFC under her leadership.
- Priorities Francesca identified are; financial health of institutions, outcomes assurance and quality, reform such as the Tertiary Education and Training Bill, research and innovation, net zero and equalities.
- Francesca offered a conversation between Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland the SFC to discuss how the funding allocations are awarded and co-produce the allocations and plan for the future.
- She then went on to discuss the work of the SFC and their continued focus on data gathering and analytics, increasing their capability to collect, analyse and understand data and use effectively with the sector.

## Question and Answer

### **Mary Senior, Universities and College Union**

- On reform, this has been on the agenda for a long time and seems to be more about efficiencies so worried about that. Also, how will the SFC be able to continue doing the day-to-day work of the organisation and also work on the reform agenda?

### **Francesca Osowska, Scottish Funding Council**

- Unfortunate to feel that way about reform, it really is about making a difference and improve learner experiences with a more straight forward journey and access to different pathways. Have the building blocks to deliver on reform and need to change that narrative.

#### **Michael Marra MSP**

- Finances are imperative to reform which we have learned a few times having been down this route, what do you think the other imperatives of reform are?

#### **Francesca Osowska, SFC**

- A more aligned function for SFC – ensuring choices for provision are more clear, simple visible to people. Change in the sector through a sector led discussion on what the future looks like. Helping institutions respond individually to learner needs.

#### **Liz Smith MSP**

- In terms of demographics, particularly the rural economy, access to university isn't always simple which the Open University in Scotland does help with. Will the SFC look at more workable structures for those in rural areas who want to go to university?

#### **Francesca Osowska, SFC**

- If an institution came to the SFC and presented an opportunity for support from the SFC on this issue, we would have a conversation and determine where we can help as there is no one size fits all approach and is unique to each institution.

#### **Paula Dixon, EIS**

- Looking at the UHI transformation by 2030 plan, there is a lot about finances but not a lot about education provision. Should this look more at access to education for all levels and rural economies?

#### **Francesca Osowska, SFC**

- The business case is still being developed and is a proposal for funding to develop a business plan but access and education provision should be considered.

**Jason Miles-Campbell, Jisc**

- How do you see shared service support in Scotland?

**Francesca Osowska, SFC**

- Multiyear funding is difficult for us, Scottish Government and people we fund and an arrangement from the UK Government would be welcome as we can right now only allocate on an annual basis. Jisc play an important role in shared services and this must be factored into multiyear settlements.

## Conclusion

Ms Smith closed the meeting by thanking the speaker for their contribution and insightful questions from members. She stated the next meeting will be held in June.