

A Changing Landscape for Tertiary Education and Research in Scotland

Consultation on the merger of the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council

RESPONSE: SCOTTISH ENTERPRISE

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the consultation on the merger of the Scottish Further Education Council and Scottish Higher Education Council.

In general, we are pleased to welcome the forthcoming merger as an opportunity for the new organisation to play a significant and proactive role in shaping and delivering an ambitious growth agenda for Scotland. We would welcome enabling legislation that would help to maximise the economic potential of all tertiary education providers.

More specifically, we agree with the proposal that the new body should engage with Scottish Enterprise (SE) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), amongst others, to support the objectives of *Smart Successful Scotland* for future skills needs, commercialisation and innovation. We believe therefore that any legislation should be enabling, creating the capacity to develop a broad strategic understanding in regard to the skill needs of the economy and society. It follows that the legislation should allow for flexibility to adapt to changes in those needs rather than be prescriptive. We welcome proposals that build on the existing strengths of diversity of providers and to make sure the evolving system is increasingly learner-centric.

We agree the new body should have an important role in the identification of current and future learning and skills needs, and promote the relevance of learning to work and life opportunities. In working with other organisations to inform this activity it clearly must be wary of micro-managing and over-planning. We expect it will aim to adopt a strategic position, able to regard in equal measure regional and local skills needs and be alert to key trends in the labour market.

With regard to broader objectives for research and knowledge transfer as well as skill needs, we agree the new body should seek to collaborate in full, and that the exchange of information between various organisations and the new body will be important. We appreciate the ambition to allow the new body a degree of authority in such dealings with other organisations; however we would seek further clarification of the proposed legislation that would put a duty on organisations such as Scottish Enterprise and the Local Enterprise Companies to provide this information. The arrangements should, we believe, be reciprocal and build on existing information-exchange arrangements and be wary of undoing efforts earlier in the draft legislation to create collaborative and consultative processes.

We agree that the new body should have responsibility for funding across the providers, and that the distribution of funds should be carried out within a strategic funding framework established by Ministers and informed by strategic dialogue.

The strategic dialogue would need to bring clarity to national, regional and sectoral priorities **and** the extent to which these are to influence the whole tertiary education system. It will need to establish the balance between:

- the diverse needs of learners and of the economy, including both education and research and development needs
- the achievement of national priorities and regional variations
- priority groups (for example social inclusion - adult basic skills) and economic development needs

We would welcome future discussion and engagement with the new body to contribute to its development of the framework, including contributing to the provision of information and analysis regarding the broader skills needs of Scotland's economy and learners. We would be especially interested in the development of a framework that is able to transcend local boundaries, and also takes account of global opportunities available to many across the tertiary education sector.

We welcome proposals to enable funding of networks and collaborations, building on existing legislation which already allows for a range of learning providers to be funded. Whilst not requiring specific legislation, we believe it will be important for the new body to develop clear criteria against which all new providers would be assessed.

We believe the new body should through its actions encourage the achievement of outcomes and be wary of prescribing the manner in which those outcomes should be achieved. The ability of the new body to encourage excellence and facilitate knowledge transfer within the sector to help maximise potential educational and R&D impact is an important prospect, and one which we would welcome.

Our final comment at this stage relates to the exclusion of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. We understand the reasons for its exclusion at this stage in its development and welcome the emphasis placed on its continued development and support by the sector.

We would welcome follow up discussions as the consultation progresses and beyond, especially in regard to the identification of skills needs and the exchange of information and analysis.

END.

Scottish Enterprise
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