

**A Changing Landscape for Tertiary Education and Research
in Scotland**

**A Consultation Paper on the merger of The Scottish Further Education
Funding Council and The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council**

**Response by
Inverness College UHI**

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Response to the Consultation

A. Introduction

1. Inverness College UHI is pleased to have been given this opportunity to respond to the consultation paper on the proposed merger of the Scottish Further Education Funding Council and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council.
2. Our response is framed by our being an incorporated college of further education, as defined in the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992.
3. We are also one of five incorporated colleges of further education of the UHI Millennium Institute (UHI) designated a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in 2001.
4. Being both a further education college and an Academic Partner of UHI we therefore feel particularly well placed to respond to the Paper and to the draft Bill.
5. We are fortunate to have been part of a broader forum for discussion of the consultation paper and draft Bill through membership of a sectoral committee convened for this purpose by the Association of Scottish Colleges (ASC).
6. As part of its deliberations the ASC committee has met with Principals and Vice- Chancellors representing the Universities Scotland (US) main committee.
7. Our joint ASC/US response "Opportunity, Excellence and Enterprise: our vision for university and college education in Scotland" resulted from this.
8. The ASC committee has met also with the Deputy First Minister and Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning and colleagues within the Scottish Executive representing further education and higher education.

B. General comments

1. We broadly welcome the tenor of the recommendations within the consultation paper.
2. We see a merger of the funding councils as the opportunity to introduce a necessary coherence to post-secondary education in Scotland.
3. The establishment of a new Scottish tertiary education sector, combining the former further and higher education sectors, will also enable integration of currently separate systems within the two funding councils.
4. This should enable enhanced efficiency and greater effectiveness of the new, single, unified funding council.
5. From the colleges' and universities' perspective we look forward to a true parity of esteem developing amongst all tertiary education institutions, something which, in our view, the present binary divide has not facilitated.
6. The opportunities for greater collaboration and true partnership working amongst tertiary education institutions, and to be able to make a real difference, will be so much the greater with a single funding council.
7. Most of all, however, we view the potential benefits of a merger through the eyes of the learner. In its preliminary consultation submission the NUS Scotland reminded us that for the half a million or so students it represents, FE and HE do not exist as separate and defined sectors.
8. We wish to ensure that the outcome of the merger shall provide equal opportunity for all those choosing to proceed with learning post-school; that the delivery of learning is adequately resourced; and that the quality of the experience of all tertiary learners is the same, irrespective of whether the learner is at college, a higher education institution, or university.

C. Specific comments

1. The Ministerial Foreword in the consultation paper highlights the need to contextualise the merger proposal within the Scottish Executive's Strategy for Lifelong Learning "Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life". Yet the title of the consultation paper 'A Changing landscape for Tertiary Education *and Research* in Scotland', through its inclusion of *research* in the title, implicitly acknowledges the primacy of research over skills acquisition post-merger. Will not ensuring that Scotland has a workforce with the necessary

skills be of equal importance as research in realising a Smart, Successful, Scotland? Wasn't this what 'A partnership for a Better Scotland' also stated in May 2003? ("*charge them to have regard to the future skills needs of Scotland*" paragraph 4, page 4).

2. It is suggested therefore that the proposal within the consultation paper for the continuation of a Research Committee as a statutory committee within the new body should be complemented by a statutory Skills Committee, thus acknowledging the equal importance of research (and its commercialisation) and skills (and their acquisition) in tertiary education in Scotland.
3. The concept of a Specified Tertiary Education Provider (STEP) is considered clumsy, unnecessary and unclear in its intent. If the intention is to provide a future funding avenue for providers of lifelong learning other than colleges, HEIs and universities (which would be designated STEPs), then the draft Bill would need amending to ensure that the necessary and stringent quality and standards thresholds are specified criteria for STEP designation.
4. The draft Bill should provide a definition of a STEP as per Annex A of the consultation paper. (Annex B, which provides a listing of STEPs, is to be found in both the Consultation paper and in the draft Bill).
5. It would appear from the submissions published in the consultation paper that others share concerns about the long-term implications of proposals to extend the range of learning providers via the designated STEP route. The belief is that Scotland is well served by its existing publicly accountable FE colleges and HEIs. We agree.
6. The manner of listing of STEPs in Annex B (Incorporated colleges; Non-incorporated colleges; Higher education institutions; Ancient and chartered universities) is considered unhelpful, provocative and potentially divisive. It is sincerely hoped that this form of categorisation will not be used post-merger. It would have been simpler, and more logical (and less elitist), to have provided a consolidated alphabetical listing of the Scottish tertiary education institutions.
7. In our view, therefore, there is no requirement for the proposed additional category of STEP; that the case for its introduction has not been convincingly made; and that it would be more appropriate to refer to colleges, HEIs and universities collectively as tertiary education institutions (TEIs).
8. The UHI Millennium Institute (UHI) and Crichton University Campus are provided as two examples in the consultation document of new approaches to the delivery of tertiary education in Scotland. The Crichton is a single campus collaboration involving 2 universities, an HEI, and a college of further education.

9. This is quite different from the UHI Millennium Institute (UHI). The UHI is a multi-campus federation of 14 FEHE colleges and research organisations, serving the higher education requirements of 4,500 students in the Highlands and Islands, covering an area equivalent to 20% of the United Kingdom. It does not yet have university status, nor does it have degree awarding powers.
10. The uniqueness of the UHI is in its extensive network of colleges, which provide direct pathways of progression from HNC to HND to degree, on a single college campus, if need be. The colleges of the UHI, and their 30,000 or so students, are clearly already a working model of the type of tertiary education that the Tertiary Education (Scotland) Bill is intending to promote more widely throughout Scotland in the future.
11. As an Academic Partner of the UHI Millennium Institute, Inverness College UHI is one of the five incorporated FEHE colleges in Scotland, listed in Annex B, which provides pathways of tertiary education permitting progression via direct articulation from further education study onto HN programmes and thence to first degree and higher degree programmes. As such it receives funding from both SFEFC and from SHEFC. The general arrangements for future funding described in the consultation paper and in the draft Bill do not deal with the specific cases of these five incorporated UHI colleges.
12. The Academic Partners of the UHI receive funding for their FE activity directly from SFEFC. On the other hand, funding for their HE activity is received from SHEFC via an executive office which subsequently allocates funding to the UHI colleges.
13. It is gratifying to note in the consultation paper that current FE-HE funding relativities would be preserved post-merger. However, it is not clear how funding for advanced tertiary (non-FE) would be provided to the UHI colleges post merger; nor is it clear how the funding for non-advanced tertiary education (FE) would be provided to the UHI colleges post merger.
14. These funding issues, which will become the responsibility of the single new body post merger, will be most important in terms of preserving the autonomy and independence of those individual incorporated colleges which are Academic Partners of the UHI Millennium Institute.
15. It is surprising to note in paragraph 54 that the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is to be dismissed as the basis for defining tertiary education as it "is not mature enough at this stage". This is even more surprising as paragraph 102 states "*Through the SCQF and SCOTCAT, Scotland has been at the forefront in Europe in developing credit and qualification frameworks which facilitate and support successful articulation.*" Furthermore, paragraph 148 states "*The use of the SCQF, even though it is still in its infancy, can prove to be an effective tool in making the qualification*

structure, and through this the links between the education institutions, simpler and more customer-focussed".

16. Through not adopting the SCQF to describe Scottish tertiary education post-merger, an important opportunity would have been missed, for the reasons stated in paragraph 102 and in paragraph 148. The joint ASC and Universities Scotland statement also makes the same point in its submission: "*The coherence created by the SCQF is a cornerstone on which Scotland can build joined-up and lifelong learning for all*".
17. Therefore, we strongly urge the formal adoption of SCQF as the basis for describing tertiary education in Scotland, its associated levels of provision and opportunity, and the pathways of articulated progression it promotes.
18. It is felt that the new Funding body should have an important role to play in helping to shape the future of tertiary education in Scotland. This could be in the ways described in the consultation paper, namely by influencing, incentivising and stimulating activity within its funding purview.
19. It is recognised that there will also be a continuing need for the new overarching body to facilitate pan-sectoral strategic developments, for example collaboration between providers and mergers and new institutional models. In such circumstances we would anticipate that the new body's role would be primarily one of facilitation. We do not envisage the new body having a planning remit.
20. In so far as the name of the new body should properly describe its role, the name of the new body is an important consideration. It should also be generally understood. The public understanding of the meaning of 'primary' education and of 'secondary' education is good. The use of the word 'tertiary' to describe post-secondary education is both consistent with this and is logical. Once adopted it would quickly become popularly accepted as the third member of the education trilogy: primary; secondary; tertiary.
21. Therefore we endorse the recommendation within the consultation paper and within the draft Bill that the new body should be titled the **Scottish Tertiary Education Funding Council**.