

JOINT FUTURE THINKING TASKFORCE ON UNIVERSITIES

Meeting at the Scottish Parliament on 20 December 2007

Attendees

Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning
Sir Muir Russell, Convener of Universities Scotland and Principal of University of Glasgow
Bernard King, Deputy Convener of Universities Scotland and Principal of University of Abertay Dundee
Sir Tim O'Shea, Principal of University of Edinburgh
Pamela Gillies, Principal of Glasgow Caledonian University
David Caldwell, Director of Universities Scotland
John McClelland, Chair of Scottish Funding Council
Mark Batho, Director of Lifelong Learning
Stephen Kerr, Head of HE and Learner Support
Claire Woodward-Nutt, HE Futures and Research (*Secretariat*)

Apologies

Seona Reid, Director of Glasgow School of Art
Stephen Noon, Special Adviser

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

1. The Cabinet Secretary welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the taskforce. She said that this initial meeting was a critical one in setting the terms of reference for the work of the taskforce over the coming months.
2. It was agreed that it would be more accurate to describe the title of the taskforce as the *Joint Future Thinking Taskforce on Universities*.¹

UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND'S PAPER ON COST PRESSURES IN 2008-09

3. Universities Scotland tabled a paper in advance of the meeting setting out in more detail the cost pressures faced by Scottish universities in 2008-09, or year 1 of the spending review period. The paper concentrated on pressures relating to:
 - Pay
 - Pensions
 - Utility costs
4. The Cabinet Secretary thanked Universities Scotland for their paper which was discussed briefly. She reiterated that she was willing to work creatively with the sector and the Funding Council on the issue of Year 1 pressures. The Cabinet remained sympathetic to the sector and higher education would be a top priority for further investment from any underspends that emerged during the spending review period.

¹ In the context of the taskforce, "universities" refers to all higher education institutions.

TASKFORCE

Chairing

5. It was agreed that the Cabinet Secretary and Sir Muir Russell would co-chair the taskforce. In practical terms, the position of chair would alternate between meetings, with Fiona Hyslop chairing today's meeting and Sir Muir chairing the second meeting. The taskforce agreed it would be inclusive in involving all its members in discussions and that the chair would not be precluded from contributing.

Participants

6. The following members of the taskforce were agreed:

Representing universities

Sir Muir Russell, Convener of Universities Scotland and Principal of University of Glasgow

Bernard King, Deputy Convener of Universities Scotland and Principal of University of Abertay Dundee

Sir Tim O'Shea, Principal of University of Edinburgh

Pamela Gillies, Principal of Glasgow Caledonian University

Seona Reid, Director of Glasgow School of Art

David Caldwell, Director of Universities Scotland

Representing the Government

Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning

John McClelland, Chair of Scottish Funding Council

Mark Batho, Director of Lifelong Learning

Stephen Kerr, Head of HE and Learner Support

Stephen Noon, Special Adviser

7. There were many other stakeholders with an interest in the work of the taskforce. However, the Cabinet Secretary stated this must be a focussed exercise with outputs delivered within a short space of time. This did not preclude her speaking to other stakeholders and Principals. While she would expect their views to be fed in to the work of the taskforce as appropriate, membership was to be confined as set out above. Universities Scotland agreed with this position.

Remit

8. Universities Scotland proposed a change to the remit to recognise that there was not a single solution, but a range of possible scenarios. It was important to recognise that the taskforce's work would include consideration of what the sector as a whole would look like. After further discussion around the wording of the remit, the taskforce agreed that it would consider:

- How to optimise and shape the contribution which the Scottish university sector can make during the next 20 years to the Scottish economy, to Scottish culture and society, and to the political priorities of the Scottish Government.

- What opportunities can be created and what barriers will need to be overcome to achieve that.
- What resources will be needed and how they will be provided.

9. It was also agreed that the output of the taskforce would contribute to the 2009 spending review.

Purpose and products

10. The taskforce agreed the purpose and products.

Process

11. A series of six monthly taskforce meetings up until June 2008 was agreed. Most meetings would be supported with a short briefing paper circulated in advance and based on the suggested template, incorporating brief contributions from both Universities Scotland and the Government.

12. It was agreed that the second meeting would allow for context setting. The Scottish Funding Council would make a contribution in respect of international comparators through John McClelland. There would also be contributions on the Scottish Government's Futures Project, the Government Economic Strategy and Futureskills Scotland.

13. Universities Scotland agreed to contribute a brief paper on which functions universities deliver and how. The taskforce agreed that a similar paper from students' perspective would be helpful. Students' representatives would be approached and asked for a contribution.

14. The reference to behaviours as part of meeting 3 was questioned. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that she was keen to explore issues around culture, experience and "soul". It was agreed that reference to outcomes would be preferable and allowed links to be made with the Government's strategic outcomes. It was also agreed that meeting 4 should be about Collaboration and Shape.

15. The taskforce agreed that there might be scope for external participants at meetings from time to time as required, but that this should be about providing a different perspective and not about representative bodies. Similarly, the taskforce would consider whether a facilitator would be required in considering specialist issues.

16. The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the issue of student financial contributions would be excluded from the scope of the taskforce. Universities Scotland would not insist on including consideration of this, although student contributions could feature as one of their eventual challenges to Government (and this would not be precluded).

17. Scottish Government officials would amend the remit paper and re-circulate it as appropriate.

Internal and external communications

18. The taskforce agreed that it would encourage free and open discussions between its members. A brief note of each meeting would be provided for members.

19. Communication of the taskforce's progress would be considered and agreed at each meeting. Any press queries about the taskforce would be passed to the press office of the Scottish Government or Universities Scotland who would liaise on taskforce communication issues.

Expectations

20. The Cabinet Secretary suggested that it would be interesting to go round the table and ask each member about their expectations of the taskforce. These included:

- No holds barred conversation resulting in some radical proposals;
- Clear long term vision of what universities can do for Scotland and some practical steps towards getting there;
- Settled view of universities that transcends spending reviews – a covenant;
- Decoding of language and recognition that we cannot agree on everything;
- Fundable way forward which is ambitious and achievable and recognises that Scottish universities do well in research, teaching, and reputation internationally;
- Shared vision of where we are going and how we get there;
- We plan and shape how we get to 2028 – rather than drift towards it;
- Recognition that a further review / taskforce should not be needed;
- Expect to be challenged – and recognise the intrinsic role, of benefit and enjoyment of debating it as part of the Scottish traditional education.

Next meeting

21. Members of the taskforce would be informed of the dates of all further meetings as soon as possible.

Scottish Government
December 2007