

## Taskforce summit – points raised in plenary

Main points were:

- Welcomed the high level of engagement on the part of the Cabinet Secretary and the SG.
- Welcomed the endorsement in the Interim Report of the continuation of the dual support system.
- Anticipated that the positive outcome expected from the 2008 RAE (increased quality and volume of research in Scotland) would result in pressure on funding that would need to be addressed. The proposed Tripartite Advisory Group would provide a useful vehicle to address such pressures.
- Concerns were raised about the exclusion of NUS Scotland and UCU/STUC from the Taskforce and the Tripartite Advisory Group. Noted that the Taskforce had been set up as a short-term group to enable the SG and the sector to challenge one another over a specific set of issues. The outcome vindicated the approach taken.
- Going forward, there would be a number of opportunities for discussion and dialogue, such as the Student Summits and the Round Table Forum. The Tripartite Advisory Group would be in addition to existing opportunities for discussion. Direct access to Cabinet to discuss funding issues was very unusual and there was a risk that expanding the Tripartite Advisory Group beyond the envisaged remit might risk restricting or rescinding the offer of direct access to Cabinet.
- Noted UCU was planning to submit a written response to the Interim Report, which it hoped would be circulated to all delegates. UCU would also be organising a seminar to discuss the report, to which all delegates would be invited.
- Queried how a "lighter touch" by the SFC would work in practice, whether it required amendments to the Act that set up SFC in 2005 and how the SFC would ensure that the widening access agenda was taken forward.
- Noted that, in a number of aspects, the SFC went beyond the scope set out in the 2005 Act and that it was not envisaged that amendments to the existing legislation would be required. Rather, it was envisaged that non essential work, such as some statistics collections and requirement for estates strategies from all institutions might cease. This would enable the SFC to focus on pursuing SG priorities, such as widening access. For example, articulation, where there is much excellent practice in the sector, but where there are still challenges due to the lack of formality of many of the arrangements.
- Suggested that clarification was required on how comparability with the rest of the UK would be assessed, for example, whether it means Government funding only or all income. Noted that there was no intention to be prescriptive in this regard, thereby enabling the HE sector to make the best case it could for resources for the sector.

- The Tripartite Advisory Group presented the sector with an opportunity to make the case for more funding.
- Noted the need to avoid undue focus on achieving targets and risk reducing the considerable contribution HEIs already make to the Scottish economy.
- Noted that the college sector was willing to engage with the outcomes of the Taskforce. A particular focus would be the need to ensure progression routes between the two sectors.
- Reassurance was sought, and given, about public scrutiny of the work of the Taskforce and the proposed Tripartite Advisory Group.
- Clarification was sought about how and when decisions would be taken about the size, scope and operation of the General and Horizon Funds. Would the Horizon Fund be policy or incentive driven? It would be important to ensure adequate attention was given to widening access also.
- Clarification was sought about how success against outcomes would be measured and how much flexibility there might be for individual HEIs to determine their own outcomes. Noted that there was no intention to constrain HEIs to a “one size fits all” approach.
- Noted that there was not any intention to micro manage HEIs. The broad intention was to ensure better alignment with the SG’s Purpose and increase levels of sustainable economic growth. This would enable a better argument for growing the size of the “cake”, which, if successful, would result in benefits for all.
- Noted an element of judgement would be required about the balance between the General and Horizon Funds. The Taskforce was looking ahead to 2028. There would be a need to amend and refine the new framework as time went on. This would include changing the dynamic between the General and Horizon Funds over time.
- Noted that the issues raised in the Interim Report went to the core of the nature of the relationship between Government, the SFC and the universities. What was the purpose of universities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Was the SFC an agent for change or a guardian of the HE sector? What do universities contribute to the SG’s Purpose? How can universities best contribute to achieving the four capacities identified in Curriculum for Excellence: successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens? How can they demonstrate what they achieve in return for a public investment of over a £1 billion a year? How can their contribution to the SG Purpose be maximised, while respecting academic freedom?

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