

**The Glasgow School of Art
Joint Future Thinking Task Force on Universities
Response to New Horizons**

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to provide comments on the report of the Joint Future Thinking Task Force on Universities report *New Horizons: responding to the challenges of the 21st century*. The response has been agreed by members of the School's Board of Governors.

A Welcome Initiative

The School welcomes the initiative of the Scottish Government to establish this Joint Task Force with Universities Scotland. This signals a new approach to partnership working which is much appreciated.

The Glasgow School of Art has an important role to play in addressing the challenges of the 21st century which the report identifies - providing the skills and talent for the continued growth of the creative industry sector, one of the Government's economic priorities; preparing the flexible, creative graduates for the changing needs of economy and society; through applied research and knowledge transfer, promoting innovation in public and private sectors; attracting overseas students and staff; raising Scotland's profile internationally - and is in a strong position to provide the "something for something" which the new partnership requires.

There are many positive proposals in the Task Force report but there are some issues which remain unresolved and, therefore, of concern.

Ambition

The Report recognises the importance of universities to the economic, cultural and social life of Scotland, their current high international standing in terms of quality and influence and the role they already play in responding to the Scottish Government's Purpose and Objectives.

The Report outlines a compelling ambition for Scotland's university sector in the 21st Century - with which we do, of course, accord - and proposes a new set of relationships between universities, the Scottish Funding Council and Scottish Government. Fundamental to delivering that ambition, however, is a higher level of investment in universities which enables them to maintain their competitive

position both within the UK and internationally. The new relationship has limited value unless and until it can deliver that additional investment.

Diversity

We welcome the value placed on diversity in the scale and mission of universities and the support for specialism as an important plank of the vision for the university sector of the 21st century. As a Small Specialist Institution which can struggle to realise its ambitions in a "one size fits all" formula based funding system, we recommend that the new funding regime to be introduced by the Scottish Funding Council addresses the diseconomies of scale which impact on SSIs. Such diseconomies were recognised previously but the compensation for them fell far short of the diseconomies which were identified.

The Glasgow School of Art, Edinburgh College of Art and the Royal Scottish Academy of Drama and Music commissioned from EKOS a report on funding for SSIs which has been submitted to the Scottish Funding Council and which we hope will inform their deliberations.¹ A copy is attached to this submission

The report concludes that the main means of funding Higher Education in Scotland consistently disadvantages the small specialist institutions. Small size creates diseconomies of scale; the focus on creative disciplines is space-demanding, expensive and under-valued by current metrics; and there is a lack of funding for key development areas, the most obvious being postgraduate provision and knowledge transfer.

The report recommends:-

- a significant increase in the SSI premium
- increased funding for estates-related running costs
- additional postgraduate funded places to address the current disproportionately low allocation
- funding to support the development of more sustainable and internationally competitive research
- capital funding to address poor estates
- a commitment, in any shift towards performance based criteria for funding, to take account of the ways in which SSIs contribute in areas such as knowledge transfer to ensure they are not disadvantaged by inappropriate metrics.

Spending Review Criteria

We welcome the criteria which the Taskforce has identified to guide the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council through future spending reviews.

¹ The Role and Importance of Scotland's Small Specialist Institutions. EKOS July 2008

The commitment to maintaining broad overall comparability of Scottish Government investment in learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange activities with the rest of the UK is crucial if the ambitions of the Scottish Government for the university sector are to be realised.

We also welcome the commitment to targeted and sustained growth in postgraduate numbers and funding. A recent report² on the funding of postgraduate provision in the creative and performing arts in Scottish HEIs concluded that, despite the importance of the creative industries to the Scottish economy, funding for postgraduate provision (taught and research) in the creative and performing arts was disproportionately low when compared to other disciplines and other countries. It is anticipated that this situation will be addressed in future Comprehensive Spending Reviews.

Lighter Touch

We very much welcome the commitment to a lighter touch Funding Council. We would also call for accountability and reporting which is proportionate to scale and the level of funding provided. Too often the reporting requirements for a £15,000 grant to an SSI are the same as that for a £15m grant to a major University.

We applaud the public acknowledgement by the Chairman of the Funding Council of the excessive requirements for information from the sector and would be happy to provide input to an exercise geared to a reduction in monitoring requirements.

General and Horizon Funds

The main questions must concern the proposal to establish two funding streams for Higher Education: namely the General Fund and the Horizon Fund.

The lack of detail makes it difficult to comment other than to seek a commitment that;

- the long-term sustainability of universities will be assured by the General Fund covering the **full** costs of all mainstream activities including learning and teaching, research, knowledge transfer, widening participation and capital. It is axiomatic that the university sector must remain financially sustainable and internationally competitive.
- The Horizon Fund will be additional to the General Fund, is used flexibly in a way which recognises the diversity of the sector and can be tailored to the needs of individual institutions.

² Research into the Funding of Postgraduate Provision in the creative and Performing Arts in Scottish HEIs
EKOS January 2007

The proposal that the Horizon Fund could be used to support specific arrangements with individual institutions delivering outcomes which may be performance or specialism related is very welcome. This offers the potential to assist small institutions and emergent disciplines to build capacity in targeted areas. But little will be achieved unless there is sufficient flexibility in the General Fund to support that capacity once built and mainstreamed. We would also be concerned if the Horizon Fund was used to support the mainstream activity of the SSIs which must be met from the General Fund, if they are to be stable and sustainable.

Tripartite Advisory Group

As with the two Funds, the exact nature and operation of the Tripartite Advisory Group is unknown. At worst, meeting infrequently (or even worse only annually) and without administrative and research support, it could become a talking shop which adds little value.

At best, operating as a dynamic, well resourced body informed by robust independent research and market intelligence, it could drive forward an ambitious shared vision for the university sector aligned to, but not in the service of, the Scottish Government's Purpose and Objectives. The competitive position of the sector in terms of funding and outputs must be a central focus of the Advisory Group's work.

The Advisory Group should also have a critical influence on the development of the Horizon Fund criteria ensuring that the General Fund is not undermined by demands that should be met from incremental spending.

The membership of the Advisory Group is also of key interest to us at the GSA. It is difficult in a relatively small group of people to reflect the interests of every part of a diverse sector but we would argue that the university sector membership should include both a representative of the SSIs and a representative of the Committee of Chairs of Scottish Higher Education Institutions.

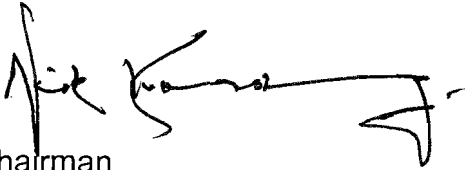
It is not just the economy!

Finally, the Report in its introductory sections describes universities as part of the "soul" of Scotland, playing a crucial role not only in wealth creation but also in developing cultural identity, fostering a more enlightened, tolerant and better informed society, providing independent and objective analysis of social issues and policies.

Whilst accepting the "something for something" argument in respect of public funding and acknowledging that universities do already support much of the Scottish Government's purpose it would be dangerous to expect universities to

realign their priorities too narrowly to the specific economic objectives of the Scottish Government. Too deep a level of instrumentalism could, in the long run, be counterproductive. The major contribution which universities make to society and to the economy emerge from their distinctive missions rather than from a specific Governmental requirement.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicky Kavanagh'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chairman

Date:

September 5 2008