

**FAO Vice Principals of Learning and Teaching/Student Experience,
for wider dissemination to all relevant institutional staff**

Supporting student engagement in the SFC Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability

In June 2020, the Scottish Government called on the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to undertake a review considering how best the SFC and the sector can fulfil its mission in securing coherent provision in post-16 education.

Since the launch of the review, sparqs has worked to support student engagement in the review, including sessions at our summer training events 'That's Quality' and our respective network meetings for student officers and students' association staff, NEON and SESN. These sessions have aimed to provide context and background to the review and have worked towards building the capacity of officers to ensure they can have a meaningful role to play as the review develops.

In August 2020, SFC put out a call for evidence across the sector, inviting institutions, associations and agencies, as well as other relevant stakeholders, to respond, highlighting what they thought the review should explore further. Over 100 responses were submitted, which have gone on to inform the phase one report. sparqs submitted to the call for evidence and you can read our [response](#), as well as [NUS Scotland's](#).

sparqs has continued to work closely with the SFC to consider how students can engage; the formation of a Student Engagement Advisory Group, of which both sparqs and NUS Scotland are members, was established in November 2020. The group helps support the SFC around ongoing tools and mechanisms for student engagement and in ensuring that students can actively contribute to, and influence, the review as it progresses.

We appreciate that the initial consultation period had a very tight timeframe and as a consequence, students were not as heavily consulted as the sector would have liked. We are keen to ensure that time and space is given to students to ensure their voice is heard in shaping and influencing the review as it progresses, and that student officers, student reps and any student can have the chance to contribute to discussions.

Phase One Report

On 20th October 2020, the SFC published their Phase One Report of the Review, '*Coherence and Sustainability: A review of Scotland's Colleges and Universities Phase One Report: Insights to Develop Further.*' The report, along with supporting documentation, can be found on the [SFC website](#).

The report states that 2020-22 will be regarded as "Emergency Years" and the SFC plans to reduce "unnecessary bureaucracy", focusing on absolute priorities to ensure continued compliance with legislative requirements, to focus on the public health emergency and front-line delivery of student education and training, research and innovation.

The report highlights ten key themes that will be explored further in phase two of the review. It will be vital that students are engaged in these discussions and are supported to comment on, and contribute to, the conversations around the themes. Students will have a lot of opinions and thoughts on some of the themes and they will find it easy to contribute; however other themes may not be so obvious, and it will be important to facilitate their engagement in a way that is accessible and valued.



- **Theme One:** Keeping the interests of current and future students, and equalities, at the heart of everything we do.
- **Theme Two:** Supporting the digital revolution for learners.
- **Theme Three:** Towards an integrated, connected tertiary education and skills ecosystem for learners and employers.
- **Theme Four:** Recognising colleges and universities as national assets and civic anchors.
- **Theme Five:** Building long-term relationships with employers and industry.
- **Theme Six:** Protecting and leveraging the excellence of our research and science base.
- **Theme Seven:** Driving the innovation agenda.
- **Theme Eight:** Enhancing collaboration.
- **Theme Nine:** Making the most of the sector's global connections.
- **Theme Ten:** Financial sustainability and funding.

How can staff support student engagement?

There are a number of ways that staff at all levels across an institution can support students to engage in the review. This list is by no means exhaustive, nor do we anticipate that staff will be able to do everything; instead, we would recommend that staff explore the list of suggestions below and consider what works best for their students and their institution, at this time, to ensure meaningful engagement.

- Ensure student officers have seen the institution's response to the call for evidence if they weren't directly involved in putting it together. Senior staff should provide time to meet with the officers from the students' association, such as the President and/or VP Education and discuss the response, taking time to talk about the themes emerging from the phase one report and what some of the priority areas are for their institution.
- Think about the institution's plans for continued engagement from senior management and other staff in the review, and how might student officers be involved in those. If staff are meeting with the SFC, could officers be brought into these discussions?
- Does the institution have a review working group? If not, could there be? This would be a great opportunity to bring a wide range of staff and students from across the institution together to discuss the review, emerging themes and the impact of any changes to the sector that might impact on the student experience.
- Where else is the review being discussed, and at what committees? How can staff support student officers to engage in review discussions before, during and after committees and play an active role in how the institution engages in the review?
- Could there be a staff member who can be a key contact for student officers if they have questions about the review or their engagement in it? Could that person provide updates as to what is happening next and opportunities as to how officers can get involved?
- Think about how the institution can support student officers to engage other students in the review, such as course reps, school/faculty officers, etc. It is really vital that a wide range of opinions can be heard across the themes of the review; encouraging staff to facilitate discussions with students and giving time and space to student officers to talk about the review within the classroom could help.
- Staff could also work with student officers to support and run workshops or focus groups that can be used to help gather a wide range of student opinions on the key themes that have emerged from the review.

Further information

For further details visit the [SFC Review webpage](#) and read the [sparqs' news article on the review](#).

If you would like to discuss any of this further, please contact Stef Black, Senior Development Consultant – stef.black@sparqs.ac.uk.