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Post-School Education and Skills Reform: Consultation on legislation

Response from Learning for Sustainability Scotland

20 September 2024

16. Information about this response

Learning for Sustainability Scotland is Scotland's United Nations University Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). LfS Scotland is a pan-sectoral membership network of more than 1,000 organisations and individuals working to harness the full potential of learning to create a flourishing, sustainable world (<http://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org>). Hosted by the University of Edinburgh, we are part of an extensive global network of more than 190 RCEs (September 2024), allowing regions to share and learn from each other, and establish or strengthen international partnerships and collaboration.

We respond based on an online consultation event for members from the post-school education and skills sector. This event was held on 4 September 2024 <https://learningforsustainabilityscotland.org/events/responding-to-the-national-consultation-on-post-school-education-and-skills-reform-legislation/> and was organised in partnership with EAUC Scotland (<https://www.eauc.org.uk/scotland>).

Learning for Sustainability (internationally known as Education for Sustainable Development) is an international and national priority for education.

'Learning for Sustainability (Education for Sustainable Development) empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. It is about lifelong learning, and is an integral part of quality education. ESD is holistic and transformational education, which addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment. It achieves its purpose by transforming society'. UNESCO <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/sustainable-development>.

Since 2021, our pan-sectoral membership has responded to the numerous Scottish Government and independent review consultations in the reform processes currently underway across the education system (Muir, Hayward, National Discussion, Withers, CLD Review). Our responses indicate the need for successful 'joining up' across the education system to achieve the transformational system change that will 'enable learners, educators, settings and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable society' (Scottish Government 2023 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/target-2030-movement-people-planet-prosperity/>).

Simplifying responsibilities for apprenticeships and student support

1 Which of the three proposals do you prefer?



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Not Answered

Please expand on your answer below:

Participants at our online consultation event (See question 16 response), agreed that change was needed to reduce complexity and simplify responsibilities for funding, and considered that the status quo (Proposal 1) was not a viable option. Proposals 2 and 3 were each considered to have challenges and advantages.

As stated in the consultation report, this is one component of wider education system reform. Extensive stakeholder engagement has been carried out via the Scottish Government-commissioned Muir and Hayward reports, the National Discussion on Scottish Education and the Withers review. We consider that a commitment to equity and sustainability principles, and Learning for Sustainability must be at the centre of all newly formed organisations, including the proposal adopted following this consultation. This will require a commitment to enabling children and young people, educators and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable world.

2 What do you think are the main advantages of your preferred proposal?

Participants at our online consultation event (see question 16 response) considered the advantages to be:

Proposal 2:

- Separate organisations for the funding of National Training Programmes (including provision for apprenticeships) and student support might make it easier to understand who to go to for what.
- A single organisation (SFC) may be too large; two organisations might be more likely to keep themselves accountable.

Proposal 3:

- One organisation might have more coordinated approaches to current and future environmental, social and economic sustainability challenges than two separate ones.
- A single body might be able to administer data gathering more effectively.

3 What do you think could be the biggest challenges with your preferred proposal?

Participants at our online consultation event (see question 16 response) considered the challenges to be:

Proposal 2:

- One organisation might have more coordinated approaches to current and future environmental, social and economic sustainability challenges than two separate ones.
- - A single body might be able to administer data gathering more effectively.

Proposal 3:

- - A single organisation (SFC) may be too large; two organisations might be more likely to keep themselves accountable
- We need spaces for innovation – a single point of reporting/responsibility allocation might become 'stale'.
- Within a single body, effective communication between different functions and departments should be a priority, and the appropriate structures for this must be created from the start



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4 Are there any other factors you think we should consider in making a decision?

As indicated above (question 1) the Proposal adopted must align with other changes underway throughout Scotland's education system. These changes recognise that the needs of learners must be at centre of any decisions made. Proposals should be mindful of the need to ensure consistent learner pathways between early years, primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education. The Scottish Government's Target 2030 Action Plan 2023 for settings 3-18yrs (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/target-2030-movement-people-planet-prosperity/>) aims

'to support and enable learners, educators and the communities around them to create meaningful, real-life learning experiences that develop and enhance the skills, knowledge, confidence and values needed to thrive in an increasingly complex and challenging world', and this should also be reflected through the pathways, processes and structures proposed for the post-school education and skills system.

Governance of the Scottish Funding Council

5 Should the 2005 Act be amended to remove the restrictions in respect of Board appointments?

6 If the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) takes on responsibility for all apprenticeship funding, what additional skills, knowledge and experience should be considered for SFC Board members?

Participants at our online consultation event (see question 16 response) considered that:

- Board representation should be drawn from a wide range of stakeholders, including education and training organisations, students, practitioners, employers and society.
- In particular there is a need for student representation on the Board. One participant cited: 'nothing about us without us'. To make these positions accessible and inclusive for a student (s) training, mentoring and financial support will be required.
- While it is an important step for SFC to have men and women represented equally on the Board, further geographical/regional, class/Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, ethnic and cultural diversity is needed.
- It is critical to include Board members with demonstrable sustainability/Learning for Sustainability skills, knowledge and experience. This aligns with the goal of 'creating conditions for 'social and economic prosperity and wellbeing, and environmental sustainability' in SFC's current Strategic Plan.
- Training on environmental sustainability and social responsibility, and their intersection should be provided to Board members.

7 Do you have any other comments or suggestions for governance of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Board or other aspects of SFC governance?

Participants at our online consultation event (see question 16 response) asked for more easily accessible information about the Board's interests:

'What are the Board's interests?' 'Are they asking the right questions to move us towards a fairer, greener Scotland?' 'Do they care about what learners and staff care about?'

Enhanced functions for the Scottish Funding Council

8 Do you think we need to introduce new duties on organisations receiving public funding to provide better information to the Scottish Funding Council



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Yes, for all organisations

Please expand on your answer below.

Yes, for all organisations

Please expand on your answer below. :

- We are facing various interlinked challenges that cut across social, environmental, cultural and economic concerns. This has been recognised by the Scottish Government in their new programme for 2024/25 (<https://www.gov.scot/programme-for-government/>). SFC's current Strategic Plan states it's goal is to 'create conditions for 'social and economic prosperity and wellbeing, and environmental sustainability'.

-Creating new duties of mandatory institutional reporting in this area from organisations receiving public funding would ensure that leaders in institutions regard this as a priority and take action.

-Such mandatory reporting on sustainability, including in learning and teaching, must be prioritised by the SFC to bring about action needed. Institutions must be both supported and held accountable to providing the required data in adequate quality and scope.

9 Do you think there is a need to strengthen existing systems and processes for collecting data?

Yes

Please expand on your answer below. If you answered yes, then please explain why the data is needed:

Participants at our online consultation event (see question 16 response) recognised that data specialist input is required. The following suggestions were made, aiming to strengthen existing data systems and processes in support of equipping our learners to contribute to the wellbeing of people, planet, and the economy:

- Value both qualitative and quantitative data, including stories and case studies based on conversations between SFC, practitioners and learners.
- Measure the longer-term impact of education provision, such as student outcomes, the impact students and practitioners have on the community, etc. One participant stated, "We don't really understand the student journey; why sustainability or green skills-oriented programmes are undertaken; why students choose different pathways and what restricts their choices."
- Collect data that identifies, evidences, and highlights the challenges which influence student choice around uptake and completion of programmes such as sustainability or green skills-oriented programmes.
- Capture the voices of diverse learners: ensuring that we do so in a way that captures regional, cultural, SIMD diversity across Scotland.
- Set expectations around action planning to evaluate and address sustainability in the curriculum and associated training provision, e.g. via curriculum mapping, student surveys, or assessment of sustainability skills provision. It is key here, however, that the SFC recognises workload and resource requirements, and offers support/signposts to support.



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- Collect data on extent of uptake of professional development for sustainability in learning and teaching and operations, in line with SFC's net zero and EDI ambitions.

10 Do you think there is a need to strengthen existing systems and processes for reporting and publishing data?

11 What information about funded organisations would you most like to know and why?

Please give us your views.:

Open, accessible transparent reporting and sharing of quantitative as well as qualitative data regarding the integration of sustainability across institutions' operations, estates, and learning and teaching is required as a contribution to Scotland's overall National Performance Framework and Outcomes and ultimately the global UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015-30.

12 What, if any, additional powers should the Scottish Funding Council have in order to help ensure the post-school education and skills system operates effectively?

A legislative requirement for the SFC's purpose to be underpinned by the values, principles and practice of equity and sustainability should be made explicit, with a need for its actions to have regard for 'current and future generations', aligning with the learners' entitlement to Learning for Sustainability set out in Scotland's Target 2030 Learning for Sustainability Action Plan. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/target-2030-movement-people-planet-prosperity/> .



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