

## **EIS Submission to Scottish Parliament's Education & Skills Committee for Higher & Further Education**

1. The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland's largest teacher union representing over 60,000 teachers and lecturers, is pleased to submit this short paper to the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament in advance of the SFC Chief Executive's appearance before it on 15<sup>th</sup> May, and the Minister for Further & Higher Education on the 20<sup>th</sup> May.
2. The EIS is the sole union recognised for representing college lecturers in Scotland and it has over 6,000 lecturers in membership. Although the EIS has members at all Scottish HEIs, it is recognised for collective bargaining primarily in the post-92 HEIs – i.e. the newer HEIs such as Edinburgh Napier University, University of the West of Scotland, Robert Gordon University, Glasgow School of Art, Heriot Watt University and Glasgow Caledonian University. The EIS also has legacy trade union recognition at Edinburgh University, as a result of a previous TUPE merger. Further and Higher Education matters are dealt within the EIS by separate self-governing FELA and ULA Executive Committees.
3. College and University staff reacted rapidly to mitigate the effects of closing campuses to students. These responses showed the resilience and professionalism of lecturers and other staff to respond creatively and effectively to campus closures. The move from learning in colleges/universities to learning at home has necessitated a massive and immediate development, implementation or expansion of online teaching to all students – followed up by responding to student queries on various online platforms. For many lecturers, these actions have been carried out whilst exercising their own responsibility as parents or carers.
4. The role of colleges and universities in Scottish society are both crucial, and both need to be protected and maintained during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond, particularly if there is an economic crash. Colleges offer an immediate way to retrain, re-skill and upskill students and workers for the future shocks in the employment market that are expected. It is estimated that the pandemic

will affect the poorest people in society the hardest<sup>1</sup> – and colleges have a proven track record in supporting these. The Universities also have a crucial role to play in society, educating large numbers of people and pushing the bounds of knowledge and skills in order to continue to develop our nation in a knowledge based economy that is essential to thrive in the modern world.

## Higher Education

5. Scottish Universities have an international reputation for excellence both in areas of research and teaching. Most universities have invested in virtual online learning environments (or equivalent) and use lecturer recordings to complement face-to-face lecturers and online video conferencing (e.g. between international collaborators) is common. Consequently, the closure of campuses to students and move to solely online learning was relatively straightforward compared to other sectors. The move to online assessments and the use of projects instead of exams for some students has also been successful.
6. Scottish Universities attract large numbers of international staff and students. Some universities are more world facing than each other, and the large number of international (i.e. non-EU) post-graduate students is particularly prevalent in the pre-92 universities. As post-graduate fees are high, these students have provided a significant source of income. The SFC has stated this to be around £680m per annum.
7. The Audit Scotland Universities' Finances 2019<sup>2</sup> stated that 32% of Universities income, £3.7Bn, comes from tuition fees; with half of this coming from overseas students.
8. Scottish Universities have deliberately set out a strategy of increasing their numbers of overseas and rUK students in order to increase revenue. The number of Scottish (and EU) students are capped by the Scottish Government. The increase in overseas students has come at the same time as a real term cut

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<sup>1</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/covid-19-will-hit-poor-hardest-heres-what-we-can-do-about-it>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

in University funding from the Scottish Government<sup>3</sup>. These cuts have been focused on the larger research-intensive universities that have been able to offset the cuts by increases in overseas students. It has been previously accepted by the SFC that public funding of teaching provided to students is less than the cost of providing that education<sup>4</sup>, and that this shortage is made up by fees paid by overseas students.<sup>5</sup>

9. The extent to which the reliance on overseas students to support Scottish Universities has become an over-reliance is open to debate. Around two years ago, the Scottish University sector set out the dangers to it of a restrictive UK immigration policy that could limit the number of overseas students<sup>6</sup>. Brexit has also been identified as a risk to the number of overseas students in Scotland. The reliance of Scottish Universities on overseas students is therefore well known<sup>7,8,9</sup>.
10. The SFC has modelled that Covid-19 will lead to a significant decrease in the Universities operating surplus in 2019-20 and a huge decrease of between £383-£651m in funding to the University sector 2020-21. The 2020-21 figure is a significant shock and is projected to put the University sector into a collective deficit in 2020-21. The Fraser of Allender Institute states that “ Together with income from EU students, it is likely that around £850 million would have been earned from international students in 2020-21, roughly £1 in every £5 of the sector’s turnover and around 60 times its expected surplus.”<sup>10</sup>
11. Some Scottish Universities also have large numbers of rUK students who pay £27,750 for a four-year undergraduate course, whereas Scottish and EU students have their tuition fees paid for by the Scottish Government. The EIS

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Governance/TRAC\\_2017-18.pdf](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Governance/TRAC_2017-18.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/16081749.scottish-universities-reliant-on-international-student-fees-in-wake-of-public-funding-cuts/> Universities Scotland said: “The higher education sector in Scotland is under increasing financial pressure and current funding from the Scottish Government, or through partnerships, does not meet the full economic costs of publicly-funded teaching, research and knowledge exchange

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/16081749.scottish-universities-reliant-on-international-student-fees-in-wake-of-public-funding-cuts/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-14277947> (2011 news report)

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.rse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AP18\\_02.pdf](https://www.rse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/AP18_02.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> <https://fraserofallender.org/scottish-economy/labour-market/covid-19-impact-on-scottish-universities/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://fraserofallender.org/scottish-economy/labour-market/covid-19-impact-on-scottish-universities/>

believes that it is possible that an economic downturn may reduce also the number of rUK students moving to Scotland and thereby living away from home. A reduction in rUK students is going to significantly impact some of very Universities that will be hardest hit by a reduction in overseas students.

12. The EIS welcomes the Scottish Government's £75m in additional funds, allocated to support research in the sector. However, given the key role that universities play in both the education system and wider society, the EIS calls on the Scottish Government to support the University sector with further additional funding. The EIS would argue that this funding should come with caveats which protect job security for university staff and reduce precarious work in the sector.
13. The EIS believes that the University sector has a mixed record on engaging with its own staff. Some universities have worked well with trade union representatives in seeking to mitigate the effects of future funding pressures. Other universities have excluded recognised trade unions from important workstreams at a local level.
14. Furthermore, contrary to the Fair Work Framework, there is no sector bargaining mechanism in existence for the Scottish HE sector. There is only UK national collective bargaining on the value of the national pay spine. The EIS believes the Scottish Government should encourage and facilitate greater partnership and collaborative working between recognized trade unions and the universities on a national level.
15. The EIS supported members during the last round of university funding cuts that arose due to the financial crisis of 2009. Universities did not work collaboratively with staff at that time, and part of the strained industrial relations within the sector come from that time. The EIS hopes that the same mistakes will not be made during the Universities next response to a financial crisis.
16. The Universities' responses to the last financial crisis was to cut staff, freeze pay, and move to a more casualised workforce structure with many zero hours

contracts. Whilst Universities are intrinsically built on human capital, the amount they spend on their staff as a proportion of their income has fallen steadily in recent years.

17. Trade unions such as the EIS wish to work collaboratively with Universities to seek to resolve the consequences of financial problems together. This may include Universities using some of their reserves and staff working in more agile ways, including a greater blend of online teaching to overseas students in particular, the EIS is willing to have honest, frank and difficult conversations with both members and employers in order to bring about actions that secure posts and the sector over the long term.

## **Further Education**

18. Although the college sector has fewer international students, it too will be badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Colleges are public bodies and are underwritten by the state so they do not carry reserves as such, and cannot raise finances in the same way as Universities.
19. The Fraser of Allander Institute estimates that Scotland's Colleges add £20 billion to the Scottish Economy. These institutions provide key opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, for mature learners and for those looking to reskill after redundancy. Given the likely wider impact on the jobs economy, it is our view that Colleges will play a key role in getting displaced workers back into skilled employment.
20. Furthermore, colleges offer well paid, skilled jobs to local economies and are major employers in some locations (Glasgow being one example). If there were large cuts to staff numbers as a result of budgetary deficits caused by Covid-19, the impact on local economies beyond the immediate loss to individuals could be severe, as well as being a retrograde step in terms of capacity of provision
21. Colleges also provide training and assessment in key worker areas ensuring our public services, like care homes for example, have adequate numbers of skilled

up, fit to practise workers. It is vital to get these courses resumed quickly and ensure capacity is not diminished in these areas of work.

22. Colleges finances have been under pressure and the SFC has stated that most colleges will be in deficit next year (2020-21) owing to the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown. The EIS believes that Scottish Government should provide additional funding to maintain the sector and prevent redundancies.
23. Relations with the trade unions at the national level have been variable in the FE sector. National bargaining has delivered a single pay framework and common key terms and conditions, as well as some general agreements on the response to Covid-19. There are however strains in the national bargaining mechanism (NJNC) as the trade unions feel that the spirit of partnership expected by unions or the Fair Work Convention is often missing. The NJNC should be used as the body to consider and plan college's workforce responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Proper partnership working, in good faith and with a view to reaching agreements is in the view of EIS essential to getting colleges back on their feet in post pandemic Scotland.
24. The EIS FELA notes that the EIS is closely involved with the Government, COSLA and other national stakeholders planning at the Education Recovery Group (ERG) but no such group exists in the college sector (despite it also being part of the public sector). The EIS calls for the formation of such a group.
25. We believe partnership working is possible and can improved by asking the Scottish Government to attend future NJNC meetings as observers.
26. The ongoing SQA assessment of college students for external awards during lockdown may lead of inequalities in the awarding of qualifications as colleges are using different assessment procedures.
27. We also note that since caring responsibilities (especially for single parents with small children) are more likely to affect women, that this position on continuing assessment could particularly disadvantage that group.
28. EIS believes the current position of continuing assessment in the college sector could be unfair and confusing, and it urges the government to consider asking the SQA to re-evaluate the possibility of imposing a cut-off date of pre-lockdown for assessment wherever that is possible.

29. Whilst colleges have been closed to students, the teaching and learning has been moved online. There is anecdotal evidence of a variable take up of this work by college students. The EIS believes that great care needs to be taken with future online or blended delivery in the college sector. The EIS believes that some courses and indeed some students are not best suited to remote learning using online platforms and that most college teaching needs to be done face-to-face.
30. The EIS is cognisant that there are some organisations that are pushing for more progress on the Learner Journey Review. This work should not be rushed to address financial challenges in the college or university sector as will have profound implications for young people and schools too.
31. It should be recognised when considering the vital role of Colleges that there are quite different demographic profiles from Universities and that the access to digital learning is not likely to be as high as in other parts of the education sector. In a student survey conducted by EIS, 20% of the respondents indicated that access to IT or broadband was a barrier to their studies during lockdown. In addition, the older profile of students means that it is more likely that these students will have dependent children or caring responsibilities. Having dependent children at home with no school/childcare was also seen in our survey as a significant barrier to study. With these issues in mind, it is clear that digital study is not always an appropriate substitute for face to face teaching and we believe the levels of digital provision currently happening in the midst of pandemic should not be seen as desirable or normal, post pandemic.
32. Colleges will have challenges to deliver using current social distancing guidance (for example hair and beauty). The capacity for these courses and expertise of the lecturing staff will however need to be preserved.

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