ENGAGEMENT ON PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES FOR POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION, SKILLS AND RESEARCH

Introduction

This paper describes the approach taken to consult and engage with people from across the system as we developed the Purpose and Principles. It outlines the context and approach utilised including its strengths and weaknesses prior to setting out the key findings as respondents, including senior leaders, staff, board members, industry and employer representatives, learners and prospective learners, told us what was and what was not working in the current system.

Methodology

Context for engagement

The task to reimagine and redesign a post-school education, skills and research system that would be sustainable and fit for the future came at a time of significant challenge and uncertainty with shifts in demography, technology, economy, global politics and finances alongside recovery from the pandemic. It was therefore critical that the work drew on the collective knowledge and wisdom of those who have vast experience of the current system but also who have the knowledge, vision and appetite to shape a future system. However, in seeking to engage with this knowledge, we were mindful of the considerable effort and resource people within the system have already expended helping to clarify and understand the challenges and strengths within the system and envisioning what a future could look like.

There has been a series of reviews over the last 5 years (see Annex A), all of which have derived from substantial but varied engagement with policymakers, practitioners, business, industry and learners. In addition to these reviews there have been numerous other relevant reports examining different aspects of the system either in Scotland or the UK as well as the strategic planning and policy documents by individual sectors . Engagement for the Purpose and Principles deliberately built on the cumulative findings of prior engagement as published in these reviews and reports.

The engagement also ran concurrently with the [Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape](#) took place from September 2022 to May 2023. The review focussed on the skills landscape but included significant engagement with many similar interest groups to the Purpose and Principles work, including employers, agencies, colleges and universities and business organisations. Although some independent engagement was undertaken with businesses for the Purpose and Principles, to reduce consultation fatigue, the independent analysis of engagement for Withers was also utilised to ensure the voice of business was heard in terms of the issues raised in the Purpose and Principles. The Review was published in June 2023 and [results](#) from a call for evidence and a full analysis of engagement was published alongside the review.

Work on the Purpose and Principles for post-school education, skills and research, is also being taken forward at the same time as a range of other reviews relating to

different aspects of the lifelong education and skills system. This includes the National discussion on education, the Hayward review of qualifications and the establishment of new governance bodies to replace the SQA and Education Scotland. Wherever possible we have worked to reduce any duplication in engagement and to ensure that messages given to one area of reform are passed on and heard by others.

Given the amount of engagement conducted in this area over the last 5 years it was really important that engagement for the Purpose and Principles was respectful of this previous engagement and current engagement and sought to build on this work, developing an approach which was proportionate to the task.

Approach to engagement

This area is one of great complexity. It did not suit a one-off written consultation process but rather an ongoing and phased engagement process which allowed us to discuss points and jointly build our knowledge and thinking with practitioners and learners, seeking to develop and refine outputs.

This approach was assumed from the start with Phase 1 engagement building on a collation and review of existing evidence, reports and commentary and leading to the publication in July 2022 of the initial scope and approach. This was subject to substantial engagement with stakeholders across the system including agencies, business representatives, colleges, local authorities, student bodies, unions and universities to help us understand the scope and shape the forward work programme. Through this Phase 1 work, we heard that it was important to value what we have; draw out examples of good practice; start where we are and use what we have; recognise the challenges; be clear on scope; talk to the unusual suspects; learn from others; recognise that reform would take time and require leadership and partnership and make connections across the system. These were messages we continued to hold as we moved forward with the work.

From this initial base we were able to undertake further Phase 2 engagement from September 2022 to December 2022 with a wider range of stakeholders across the system to develop and test our initial thinking. This round of engagement helped us to build-out a first draft of the Purpose and Principles, then to discuss, test and sense-check it until we had an interim version of the Purpose and Principles which was published in December 2022. Phase 2 engagement showed us that apart from some disagreement around language, the work was broadly in the right place and there was broad consensus on the shape of the Purpose and Principles. It also helped us to identify key themes that stakeholders felt were relevant for further discussion. Hence when publishing the interim version, the opportunity was taken to start to push the discussion further to think about what the implications of the Principles would mean; where the system was already delivering and where there was room for improvement, innovation or disruption to the way things currently worked. A discussion guide set out these themes allowing interested parties to run their own sessions and report back to us. Understandably these themes also recur in the analysis of engagement set out below.

Following publication of the interim version our third and final phase of engagement (January 2023 – March 2023) began to increasingly focus on the implications of the Purpose and Principles for reform in the system. This segment of engagement was delivered through two key strands of work; targeted engagement with those delivering in the system and user centred engagement with a focus on lived experience for learners and prospective learners. This was in addition to receiving more formal written responses. This final phase of work gave an opportunity for people to provide views on the language of the Purpose and Principles as well as issues of implementation or broader system perspectives. Given the broader remit of this engagement it was important to record and analyse views more robustly than had been done with the iterative Phases 1 and 2. These three strands of work are described in more detail below and Annex B includes further detail on the range of people we spoke to or heard from.

Targeted engagement with those delivering in the system

This included discussions with colleges, universities, their staff and unions, with Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and with employers and other training providers. The aim was to seek their views at a strategic level on policy direction, collaboration, design, outcomes and implementation. To ensure that we heard a range of views we established engagement events across Scotland, taking account of the different local and regional perspectives, and across the full range of the post-school education, research and skills development system.

Our method of engagement was primarily through seeking agenda slots and attending scheduled meetings and events or through arranging one-off workshops. Attendance at already scheduled meetings allowed us to engage with a range of stakeholders while reducing additional burden for respondents. The workshops were generally sector or even institute specific, allowing attendees to discuss specific barriers, challenges and best practice. Some workshops were virtual and some in person. Efforts were made to hold at least one workshop in each region of Scotland. Both modes gave space for comments on the detailed wording of the Purpose and Principles but much of the discussion centred on the implications of the Principles and the nature of potential reform that may be needed to deliver against them.

User centred engagement and design with a focus on lived experience

It was critically important to us to embrace the spirit of the Scottish Approach to Service Design, wherein 'the people of Scotland are supported and empowered to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of their public services'. Hearing from those with lived experience of the system, including those most likely to face barriers to entry, helped us to understand the existing barriers and pain points as well as areas of good practice. This work approach was about reaching those who are system users including learners, students, apprentices and employees, as well as those with experience of delivery including staff - both front line and support staff across different areas of the system. The resources available to the team meant that the volume of this engagement was limited, both in the numbers of users engaged and in the scope. Further user centred work will be needed to ensure that the future programme of reform has users at its heart.

We knew that if we wanted to work towards a fairer and more equal society, we needed to work to ensure that the post-school system works for those who face the greatest barriers in accessing or reaching their potential. We concentrated our targeted engagement with groups we know face barriers to engagement and included those who were socio-economically disadvantaged and people with one or more protected characteristics. Reviews of secondary data along with our initial stages of engagement had indicated the characteristics of people who were less likely to engage with the system or who experienced differences in outcomes. From assessment of this we identified 4 priority groups for further investigation; non-participators; disabled learners; adult returners and learners in remote rural areas.

The method of engagement with learners was less focussed on the Purpose and Principles but allowed them to tell stories of their personal learner journeys, what had worked and helped them and where they perceived the biggest barriers in the system to be. This engagement was written up as part of the analysis in terms of 'user need statements' but also provided additional material for us to consider as part of Impact Assessments, ensuring that the Purpose & Principles uphold and expand equalities within post-school education, skills and research.

Written and template response

Alongside the interim Purpose and Principles, a discussion guide was developed (including easy read and Gaelic versions) to allow people to hold their own engagement events. A template was provided so that organisations could respond with their feedback. This template included questions related to identified themes for discussion. Some stakeholders also provided a written submission of their views on the Purpose and Principles and the themes raised.

Recording and analysing engagement

Given the range of Phase 3 engagement approaches, there was also a wide range of output from engagement. This included:
- Comprehensive notes from all meetings and workshops
- Notes and responses to graphics from user engagement
- Jamboards containing post-its
- Teams 'chats' with issues raised and follow-up discussion
- Completed response templates from organisations that had used the discussion guide to host events
- Written submissions
- Links to various data or evidence reviews

In order to analyse all the responses, they were read in detail with individual points coded on spreadsheets against relevant Principles and themes. This was undertaken for all response types to capture the full breadth of views and experiences. All responses from workshops, roundtables and focus groups were anonymised prior to coding. Some responses were double coded to check for consistency in approach across the coding team.

Given the nature of this engagement no attempt was made to quantify responses. This is for two key reasons. First, in practical terms, all of the Phase 3 engagement

was group based. People in the groups expressed views, but it was not possible to identify how many people agreed or disagreed with that view. Second, all consultation and engagement of this type was self-selecting. Whether people decided to be involved or not was up to them. People who have decided not to participate may have different views from those who did participate so consultation can never be considered to be representative of a wider population, it provides insights and prompts.

Once all the data was appropriately coded, the responses were then analysed and written up under different themes for each Principle. Themes were identified from the responses. In many cases the themes are the same as the themes set out in the original discussion document. However, this is not always the case. In reality not all themes from the discussion document became discussion points in engagement events and sometimes other themes emerged.

This report is published to sit alongside the final Purpose and Principles. Much of the detailed evidence will be useful in the next stage of work when we start to take forward reform of specific elements of the system. The whole anonymised spreadsheet will also be available to other parts of the lifelong education and skills reform programme to ensure that respondents' points are heard by the right part of the education system. In line with Data Protection Regulations this data will only be retained for as long as it is necessary to achieve the purpose it was collected for, namely informing reform in the education system. This decision will be reviewed regularly.

Strengths and weaknesses of Phase 3 engagement approach

All engagement will have strengths and weaknesses. Articulating and understanding weakness is important so that further policy development can seek to fill any gaps as and where relevant.

- The lived experience work tried to gain the views and experiences of people who would not normally engage with the post-school system. A number of focus groups were held with people who had faced significant barriers in their lives. The focus groups were arranged by trusted representative groups in the community, such as the Scottish Widening Access Programme (SWAP) or Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities (SCLD). From this we were able to get a picture of key barriers and enablers which also informed our impact assessments, but we are very aware that this was a small sample and individual barriers may look different.
- A significant amount of engagement occurred with senior management of colleges and universities. Separate workshops were held with staff and unions from which we aimed to pull out key issues, but it would not be possible to illustrate all practitioner issues from the full breadth of the system.
- Engagement with businesses was mainly carried out through existing groups such as the Industry Leadership Chairs Group, the regular meeting with business organisations including the Institute of Directors, Chambers of Commerce, Federation of Small Business and others as well as Developing Young Workforce employer groups. These were incredibly helpful in understanding relationships between education, skills and employment. However, it is recognised that the voices of SMEs are sometimes more

difficult to capture. It is also recognised that most of this discussion was about the alignment of education, skills and research provision from colleges and universities with the economy rather than about employers' responsibility for and investment in staff training and development.

- Several workshops were held by the Community Learning and Development Standards Council to inform a response from them around the role of CLD. This was really helpful work to explain this complex part of the system. However, the workshops were practitioner based and while the lived experience often captured people who had started on a CLD route, more could be done to understand lived experience here when taking forward any specific reform around CLD.
- Engagement relied on the willingness and ability of potential respondents to have time and resource to respond. This was not equal across all sectors. We have tried to ensure balance across sectoral views in the write-up, whilst acknowledging that more depth was provided from some sectors.
- Engagement themes were written into the discussion document. These themes had emerged from earlier phases of work and were used to structure final engagement sessions. Imposing a structure always has some downsides in that it adds direction to respondent views and focuses on subjects which may not have been their top priority.
- Substantial engagement was undertaken throughout the whole process to involve and collaborate with stakeholders. This allowed us to test, evaluate and understand potential impacts. However, to take this forward would need ongoing engagement around specific reform action in implementation plans including to collaborate on appraising options and deciding on the best path forward.

Despite these limitations, the engagement approach had many real strengths:
- Wide coverage across Scotland to understand specific issues in cities, towns and remote rural areas.
- Open and transparent approach to stakeholders from the start including in establishing the scope and approach.
- Good engagement from the college and university sectors, particularly through the structures related to Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland.
- Giving NDPBs and agencies the respect to have advance sight of published material so that they could sense-check our framing and thinking.
- Snowballing approach to broaden engagement based on recommendations of respondents.
- Building on prior work to reduce consultation fatigue.
- Utilising limited available resources to undertake as broad a range of engagement activity as possible.
- Clear intention to move beyond the normal suspects, engaging with staff, students, apprentices, employers including a clear focus on lived experience and user voice.
- Providing a bank of insights that can be made available to policy teams as they start to work on specific policy action.

Key findings from Phase 3 engagement

The following section outlines the views and opinions expressed by respondents who were involved in engagement events or submitted a written response. The term respondent is used for both, although it should be noted that engagement responses are the Purpose and Principles Team's notes of a real-time conversation whereas written responses are the respondents own deliberately chosen words. Findings have been structured under the 5 Principles with a general section at the beginning that picks up strategic commentary. Within each Principle, responses have been grouped under themes, many of which refer to themes in the discussion document.

General commentary

Throughout engagement one of the key themes stressed by all providers was the need for adequate, often expressed as increased, funding to support ambitions. This was mentioned in terms of aspects such as ensuring core research, enabling diverse provision, improving digital infrastructure, improving facilities through capital investment, supporting students financially and in terms of learning support or wellbeing and ensuring staff and practitioners were fairly paid and supported to train and develop. Most organisational stakeholders mentioned funding at some point.

Several respondents noted that the Purpose and Principles should include greater clarity on current 'red-line' policy and funding decisions such as the payment of tuition fees for eligible Scottish, full-time, Higher education students. Related to this there were mixed views about whether and how the ambition of the of the Purpose and Principles should relate to the current financial situation. Some respondents felt that the Purpose and Principles should be very realistic and be limited in scope to what is deliverable within current budget levels while others were concerned that the ambition of the work to set a long-term strategic intent would be unduly limited by the current financial position.

Funding was also discussed in terms of the stop-start nature of many public funding streams leading to an inability to plan long term to support more innovative and sustainable business models. These comments were made by many respondents from colleges and universities as well as agencies and some employers. Most of the views on funding related to a need for more public funding, but some respondents also mentioned the lack of prioritisation of existing funding streams and consequent funding levels permitted as well as a lack of investment for staff training within private business.

Another general comment made by a few respondents was that although in principle they were in agreement with the Purpose and Principles, that they reserved full judgement until they had more detail and could better understand the intention for implementation. For example, some respondents commented that there needs to be clarity on the implementation strategy for the Principles and that there is not enough discussion of the cultural or economic imperative for change.

Principle 1 – Transparent, resilient & trusted

The system is well-governed, financially and environmentally resilient and trusted to deliver.

For many respondents this was the key Principle with people saying that if you could get this Principle right, it would enable all the other Principles to follow from this.

<u>Language</u>

Some responses raised issues with the lack of ambition that is apparent in the language used for this Principle and highlighted that it was unclear what the Principle would mean in practice. It was noted that the word 'autonomy' is not mentioned in the Principle and that there is no reference to 'tertiary', which several college and university respondents said they would have expected to see, although other respondents were very clear is a term that is meaningless outside of the sector. One respondent also noted that they would have expected a specific reference to 'value for money.'

Many responses commented on the lack of parity of esteem expressed within the system and some queried whether this should be specifically mentioned in the Principles. Different respondents highlighted different issues with several noting that the current societal perception of colleges does not give them parity of esteem with universities, while others highlighted that apprenticeships were not given parity of esteem compared to Further and Higher education.

A few responses, mainly from the university sector, commented that universities are already resilient, and this was evident particularly through the pandemic. Their view was that the wording suggests a deficit that is not there.

<u>Funding issues</u>

Many responses commented on the importance of financial sustainability for institutions and the impact this has on the experience of learners, with some highlighting that financial sustainability should be a stand-alone Principle. It was highlighted by many that there are constant fears that funding may be withdrawn at any point while others noted the difficulty in putting in place plans to measure and evaluate the medium to long-term impact that funding is having if there is no reliability around receiving that funding long term.

Respondents also commented that annualised funding creates problems. Many responses commented on this, particularly in relation to colleges who commented that they were unable to provide schools or employers certainty on provision for the following academic year. A further consequence of this for colleges was that universities often needed to be the lead partner in initiatives to access funds because, unlike universities, colleges cannot borrow money. Subsequently, it was noted that multi-year funding, as opposed to the current annual funding model, would offer increased sustainability across the college sector.

Universities, similarly, to colleges, highlighted to us the importance of a sustainable

funding model along with the need for a greater ability to undertake longer-term planning and forecasting. This would mean a move away from what we heard described as 'repeated shocks' to the system from changes in policy and funding decisions on an annual basis. It was highlighted that this would ensure more reliable delivery in the system and would enable the building of lasting and mutually beneficial partnerships across different institutions and sectors. Many responses also commented that universities currently have a reliance on international students to fund their basic infrastructure which is not conducive to resilience.

As discussed above, the importance of a sustainable funding model has been a core theme throughout our engagement. Respondents noted a variety of benefits, including:

- Some responses commented that revising the funding and regulatory models are crucial to maintaining Scotland's global standing within the HE sector.
- It was also highlighted that a sustainable funding model would benefit the system as institutions will be able to plan into the future, which is important for workforce planning and infrastructure implications.
- Similarly, one response noted that fair work is essential in the sector and a sustainable funding model would better support this.

Respondents also recognised the need for accountability with one respondent highlighting that there should be a cost analysis of delivery of all frameworks and units so that the funding framework responds and prioritises according to need. One university sector response also commented that an effective accountability framework could provide better reassurance that the substantial public funding received by universities is delivering for students, knowledge creation, the economy, and the common good.

Funding landscape

Many respondents commented that the current funding and agency landscape can be difficult to navigate and contributes to issues with forward planning.

- It was advocated in some responses for there to be a single agency to distribute funding, with one using an example of the issue of a shortfall of college apprenticeship places because of restrictions on Skills Development Scotland (SDS) funding. Another response commented that the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) can be too 'traditional' with their funding.
- It was noted that there can be cases of 'double funding' or 'no funding' when a college works with a school in the senior phase. Several respondents commented that there are potential questions around how the current funding structure is also driving behaviours when it comes to the senior phase and what is best for the learner.
- Some respondents commented on the issue of funding being issued formulaically and not on an institution's ability to deliver. It was highlighted that there is no account of an institution's past performance to deliver when they apply for, and subsequently may receive, funds.
- These responses also noted that the needs of specific regions should be considered regarding funding. For example, one respondent reported that institutions in the North East are more likely to be supporting the transition away from Oil and Gas and should be prioritised.

Several respondents from various sectors highlighted the particular difficulties there are with the funding model for apprenticeships. It was highlighted that it is difficult to develop new apprenticeships schemes when the funding is unclear. Additionally, some respondents believe it is unclear how decisions of funding apprenticeship places are arrived at and how this decision is or is not led by employer demand.

Regulation and governance

Many respondents commented that there is too much going on in the current landscape and that the responsibilities and focus of different agencies can be blurred, making it difficult to navigate. They further warned that any additional layers will only complicate this further.

Specific sectoral comments included:
- That the process an employer would take to develop an apprenticeship is unclear and as a result the process takes too long to respond to employers' skills demands effectively.
- That the Scottish Government should be clear on outcomes and put in place associated policy incentives to ensure that the university sector can reposition and maximise opportunities for learners, for innovation and research, employers, and government priorities.
- That colleges are good at adapting to government policy as long as the priorities are clear.

There were also positive comments about aspects of regulation and governance. Several respondents spoke about the Quality Enhancement process and welcomed the development of a new framework for the whole tertiary sector. In addition, the governance structures that universities currently have in place were regarded as good by some respondents who stressed the importance of preserving autonomy for the sector. However, it was noted by others that the reform of university governance established in earlier reviews is not yet complete.

Barriers to collaboration

Many responses commented that one of the main barriers to collaboration within the system is that the system itself is cluttered and difficult to navigate; this links to the comment in the section above. This has led to a lack of understanding of how different sectors of the system work, what they are responsible for and what barriers and enablers they face. For example;
- Some responses commented that schools push for an indicative curriculum from colleges prior to Christmas, however, due to funding, this information is not known until the following March at the earliest.
- Some respondents proposed that the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) needs to be less controlling around funding and suggested that if outcomes were coded based on where a learner is in their journey it would be a more accurate reflection of the value added by the institution.
- Another response highlighted that there is a specific overlap in the roles of SFC and SDS.

The sense of a lack of recognition of the diverse missions and achievements across the system is also seen as a barrier to collaboration. As will be discussed in other Principles, many respondents highlight that there needs to be a change in the perception of the value of different types of education by people outside of the university sector.

Finally, some responses commented that a key barrier to collaboration in the system is a lack of trust. The above factors of a cluttered landscape and lack of recognition of the value of different parts of the system were thought to contribute to that lack of trust. Although, one respondent highlighted that trust does not just refer to trust within the structures and the system, but it is also about personal experience where trust can be built and lost when individuals move on.

Data and reporting

We heard from some respondents that in order to understand the value for money of the system there needs to be adequate data available and reported. Many responses highlighted that despite an abundance of data being collected across the system it does not seem to be reported on efficiently and that the current process to analyse the data is ineffective. Respondents, particularly in the college sector, expressed frustration at not being able to see analysis of the data they provide. We also heard that there is duplication in the reporting that is conducted, and respondents believe that the sectors' resilience would be better served if this were reduced. For example, reporting for Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs) is duplicated between SDS and SFC.

Some responses also highlight that there is an inability to accurately record articulation routes of learners. For example, it was highlighted that those who do not complete a full course in college and instead move to employment are attributed to 'drop-out' rates from the course, despite employment being a positive destination. Similarly, it was mentioned that the National Articulation database records when a learner moves from college to university but not the pathway that they follow post university. Another respondent highlighted that there is no data to understand whether graduates in certain subjects are more likely to be underutilised in the labour market. This reflects the response that the current metrics used to capture success are outdated.

Provider – staff terms and conditions

We heard from respondents across different sectors about the need to support staff to be able to deliver for learners. In particular, many responses commented that they would have expected to see fair work referenced as well as how the workload of staff is managed.

It was clear that upskilling and reskilling is not just limited to users of the system but also those working in the system. One response highlighted that people within the system need to be in as much of a position to benefit from upskilling and reskilling opportunities as those outside it. They further noted that the investment in staff is not always apparent, and this is particularly true for those in support roles as opposed to the opportunities given to those in core teaching roles.

A few responses highlighted that international recruitment is essential to be able to deliver services as well as to support research priorities.

Key Findings for Principle 1

- This Principle is key and respondents said that if you get the enabling environment right the system would be able to deliver.
- The system needed adequate, often expressed as increased, funding to support ambitions.
- Institutions in the system needed to be able to plan for financial sustainability and the stop-start and annualised nature of funding precluded this.
- The current agency landscape is complex and difficult to navigate with blurred roles and responsibilities. This is a barrier to collaboration.
- There is a call for greater flexibility and trust for institutions and providers related to a more effective accountability framework which provides better reassurance that the substantial public funding is delivering for students, knowledge creation, the economy, and the common good.
- A lack of recognition of the diverse missions and achievements across the system is seen as a key barrier to collaboration.
- Despite high expectations of data collection, there are frustrations in duplicate reporting and ineffective processes to analyse, interpret, report and share it.

Principle 2 – Supportive & equitable

People are supported throughout their learning journey, targeting funds and additional support to those who need it most.

Language

There appeared to be broad consensus with the wording of this Principle with no specific comments raised.

Supporting learner transitions

Transition points within a learning journey are crucial times to ensure an individual can progress successfully to the next step in their education. Many responses commented that the Principles generally must reflect that learners will have different learner journeys depending on personal circumstances, so it is important to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach to ensure learners are supported appropriately. One respondent commented that this should include clearer pathways and options for learners who wish to leave a sector outwith the 'normal' leaving points.

Some responses commented that the system should be flexible so all sectors of the system can work together through their understanding of the local and regional contexts to deliver programmes. Similarly, that the system should remain responsive so that partners within the system can adapt quickly to changing economic or other circumstances. One respondent noted issues in funding support for Postgraduate Taught courses, in particular, and reflected that to ensure access to these

postgraduate qualifications there should beadequate and competitive loan support for learners in place.

Many responses commented that it is important we "bring employers along with us" and noted that many employers are loyal and committed to supporting the training of their staff. As noted before collaboration is not always effective.

- Various parts of the system have engagement with employers, but it has been highlighted that without collaboration in this engagement it can negatively impact other sectors and may or may not benefit the learner. For example, one response noted that they have noticed that the more schools engage with employers, the less employers engage with colleges which can lead to a knock-on impact on skills development within colleges.
- Although employers are keen to engage, there have been difficulties in colleges partnering with employers due to the set-up of the Scottish system, so they have chosen to pursue collaborations in England instead. One response highlighted that they feel larger companies do not take account of and are not interested in the differences in the Scottish and English education and skills systems.
- Other responses commented that for good collaboration to exist we need to create an environment and system that is symbiotic with employers.

Learner confidence, motivation and pastoral support

It is evident from the responses that navigating the system is something that learners need assistance with, and that lecturers and learning practitioners often provide the front-line triage for both learning and pastoral support. This raised a number of issues:

- One respondent commented that it will be important to clarify the extent to which a sector or institution will have to define 'those who need it most'.
- It was highlighted as one of the key issues, that students do not know what support they are entitled to. Many respondents were of the view that providing high quality, tailored, and responsive support is critical in ensuring positive outcomes for students, but recognised that it is resource intensive. For learners from disadvantaged backgrounds this is even more important.
- It was highlighted that lecturers and learning practitioners may not have the skills needed for pastoral support and the way institutions were currently set up meant that time spent on this did not 'count' in terms of their personal workload or progression.
- Some responses commented that Covid has had a real impact on support needs of the current cohorts, and they are seeing more complex needs arising. A particular response highlighted that they are seeing learners leave school with lower confidence and lacking some basic softer skills that you would expect them to have developed.
- The cost-of-living crisis is also proving to be a challenge for learners.

However, the engagement process showed many examples of good practice in support. For example, SWAP allows the time for personal pastoral support and lecturers can talk learners through what a four-year degree would look like. We heard anecdotally through engagement that this approach has, for the most part, been beneficial in increasing learner confidence.

Impact of support on attainment and outcomes

There was widespread recognition that the provision of good quality support could help improve attainment and outcomes. However, a range of issues were raised during the engagement.

Some respondents commented that full-time students who must do paid work alongside their studies can sometimes fall behind. It was highlighted that if there was more flex in the funding model this would ease the burden, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds, by allowing students to receive some funding and work part time in order to better balance work and study.

Others noted that due to the shorter time span that learners typically attend college for it is harder to make an impact with an individual in college for only a year or two in comparison to between four and six years of senior school. One particular response highlighted that although an individual is on paper ready to move to the next level of education, a tutor or learning practitioner may have reservations about whether this is the right step for them but ultimately cannot stop them.

Regarding qualifications, some responses commented that the curriculum within schools has helpfully diversified over time. For example, there are collaborations between schools and colleges in their region where senior phase pupils can attend college for some of their qualifications. One particular response noted that in colleges there is a lot of flex over how they deliver the curriculum and specific qualifications. There is a particular issue with military qualifications where they do not always align easily to Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) (if at all), therefore, it can be hard for veterans to move into civilian life when they are unsure what their qualifications are equivalent to.

It was highlighted that it is not only university that widening access is applicable to, but there is also work to be done on attainment gaps and equality of outcomes for a learner after graduation.

Accommodating learners needs

Many respondents spoke about the need for the teaching and assessment system to do its best to support leaners' individual needs and preferences so that they can be receptive and able to learn. However, some responses commented that whilst preferable, it can take time for colleges and universities to flex to the particular needs of students especially when lecturers are under increased amounts of pressure.

Several respondents made the point that despite institutions having the same course name with the same curriculum, each institution/faculty may have a different learner offer due to different approaches and modes of teaching which may be more or less applicable to different learners. The difference in timetables and teaching styles between schools, colleges, and universities were also considered to be challenging for learners to adjust too. Further respondents commented that these issues are not understood by learners who require better advice, information and guidance when choosing their future pathway.

One particular response highlighted that they have seen an increase in grievances when giving negative feedback to students.

Widening access

A key theme that was apparent through our engagement was the commitment to widening access but accompanied by concerns that there can be a lack of acknowledgement that issues around equity and inclusion often reflect issues in wider society, such as income inequality, the cost-of-living crisis, access to mental health services, and restricted rental markets, and may not always be the responsibility of the post-school education, skills and research system to fix.

Various employers raised that attracting people into their workforce was an issue. They commented that this was becoming harder because there was a growing risk averse culture which meant that individuals in the current economic climate may be less likely to move from a current job in case it did not work out for them. Likewise, there were comments that people are more likely to be in a financial situation where they are reluctant to sacrifice their income to be able to return to education despite the potential long-term gain. This may reduce short- to medium-term demand without funding changes. This issue is compounded with mature learners who are more likely to have dependents and wider responsibilities.

Many respondents made the point that improving access to FE and HE, requires better interventions at a school level. For example, reference was made to the limited progress on closing the attainment gap in schools which has an impact on widening access to universities for learners. One response noted that colleges often actively support the government's priority of closing the attainment gap, although it does not count in measurement. Respondents noted that many pupils in S6 are very clued up and have a pathway in mind they would like to follow, however, this is not always the case.

Many responses highlighted that challenges exist in the system because it deems full-time study to be the norm, with a respondent commenting that as learning models adapt and become more flexible so too should the financial support available to students.

The practicalities of the support offered also make studying challenging for individuals with dependants. For example, a response highlighted that childcare costs only cover the time that a student is physically in college, and it is not practicable to get childcare for just two or three hours. It was also highlighted that a traditional two semester and summer break academic year may not suit all learners. For some mature learners, widening access support was noted to be vitally important with some respondents noting that access to university can often be targeted towards school-leavers.

One particular response highlighted successful programmes that have helped address inequality of access within the NHS specifically. For example, the National Training Transition Fund and Skills Boost programmes have been shown to be effective at improving learning and attainment in areas of multiple deprivation. Other

responses highlighted the positive benefits of the collaborations between colleges and universities to offer 2+2 degrees. This refers to the practice of undertaking 2 years at college to obtain an HND, then progressing to a university for 2 years to obtain a degree with the learning for both being well integrated. Many noted that there is a substantial role for universities to play in widening access through meaningful and targeted outreach activity, but this is resource intensive and cannot be achieved without significantly enhanced commitment from other sectors.

Key Findings – Principle 2

- Transition points within a learning journey are crucial times to ensure an individual can progress successfully to the next step in their education.
- Navigating the system is something that learners need assistance with.
- Widening access requires better interventions at a school level to support more disadvantaged learners into the post-school system.
- Despite many institutions having the same course name with the same curriculum, they may have a different learner offer due to different approaches and modes of teaching which may be applicable to different learners.
- Lecturers and learning practitioners often provide the front-line triage for both learning and pastoral support which could impact on personal workload and consequent progression.
- Providing high-quality, tailored, and responsive support is critical in ensuring positive outcomes for students, but it is resource intensive.
- Issues around equity and inclusion often reflect issues in wider society, such as the cost-of-living crisis, access to mental health services, and rental markets.
- Challenges exist in the system because it deems full-time study to be the norm, as learning models adapt and become more flexible so too should the financial support available to students.

Principle 3 – High quality

High quality opportunities are available for people to enhance their knowledge and skills at the time and place that is right for them.

Language

Many respondents commented on the language used to explain the Principle, with a particular focus on how 'high quality' is defined and what 'high quality' will mean in practice. The importance of ensuring high quality opportunities are available to all was also specifically noted. Other wording points raised included questioning what was meant by the term 'learners' and whether the term 'time' is referring to age and life stage rather than time of day.

Many respondents said that what was currently on offer was high quality and that the Purpose and Principles should be careful not to suggest that it is starting from a deficit position. In this regard, several respondents mentioned the existing quality enhancement approach used by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and SFC in their regulation of provision.

One specific respondent commented that the use of 'high quality' could suggest that not all opportunities are currently equal in terms of effectiveness and values. For example, several respondents raised the perception that college provision is not valued as highly as university provision. Another commented that the Principle should contain greater clarity of intent around how learners could be supported throughout their learning journey.

Qualifications – system breadth and depth

Many of the respondents commented on the variety of teaching methods already being utilised and stressed how there can be a difference in pedagogic approach even if programmes have similar learning outcomes and course titles. Respondents' comments noted that this variety could be seen through the nature of teaching and the extent of work-related learning opportunities that are available. While many respondents considered that the variety of teaching methods was apparent to professionals in the sectors, they also suggested that this was not well promoted to learners.

Related to this, many respondents from the university sector commented that there needs to be a greater understanding and appreciation of the distinction between diversity of provision and duplication of provision. They further described how different curricula may develop based on research and teaching specialisms in different institutions.

A range of respondents gave examples of existing innovative course provision or teaching approaches. Some examples included:
- The development of new GA programmes which implement simulation-based training for key roles within NHS National Treatment Centres whilst also exploring a more rationalised approach to Modern Apprenticeships (MA).
- Examples of colleges working creatively with employers, for example Dundee and Angus College identified their Partnership with Seagreen, which allowed them to create the Skills for the Future Lab (The Lab).
- The Orkney Offer which established a collaboration between all schools in the Islands region so that any school pupil can in theory do a course at any other school through livestreaming or recording of the teaching, broadening their options for post-school progression.

The need for a flexible funding model at college to allow them to effectively deliver a range of opportunities was raised by many respondents, mainly from the college sector. They highlighted that delivery models and approaches were best determined by the autonomous institutions that were delivering the learning and thought they were in the best position to target funding to support particular student demographics and their requirements.

The need for a flexible funding model was also raised by respondents in various sectors in reference to micro-credentials where they felt there needs to be more agile provision to fund these 'bite-sized' modules. One respondent highlighted that an opportunity exists to consider the potential of a credit-based or SCQF-level based

funding mechanism. They proposed that this could support lifelong learning and more effectively meet reskilling demands.

Learner journey, transitions and articulation

Through the responses a key theme reflected is how learners choose to progress through the SCQF levels.

Many respondents spoke about agreements in place between colleges and universities facilitating articulation between Further and Higher education. For example, Forth Valley College highlighted how they have partnered with four Scottish universities to offer integrated 2+2 degrees to aid the transitions from school to college to university for learners and widen access to degrees. Similarly, NESCoL in partnership with RGU, told us about their longstanding relationship providing guaranteed progression opportunities to learners with over 40 pathways available across all their academic schools.

But some other respondents focussed on the potential barriers to progression. One particular area raised by several respondents was the ineffective way in which senior phase at school was utilised with respondents noting a need for a radical rethink. Several respondents including some learners noted that young people feel that schools have nothing new to offer them due to how the system is constructed.

A few respondents commented that schools can sometimes hang onto pupils longer than they need to. This links with the point raised in Principle 1 around how the current funding structure is driving behaviours. Similarly, it was highlighted that 6th year can be a waste of time for many pupils and there would be a benefit in blurring the lines between 5th and 6th year with pupils leaving school to allow for a more personalised pathway, suitable to the individual's needs. Several respondents from the college sector suggested that there is an opportunity for them to create a better offer for many learners who may not be appropriately served by staying at school.

A number of other specific comments related to the senior phase transition included:
- During the engagement we heard of many attempts to raise awareness of options and ease the transition from school to post-school. For example, some colleges currently offer more technical taster sessions to S3/S4 pupils who are unlikely to continue at school.
- There was also some evidence of competition for students. Some responses from the college sector highlighted that universities have, in some cases, been lowering entry requirements, targeting people who otherwise may have gone to college. However, we have also heard of collaborative agreements between a college and university in the same region not to do this.
- Several respondents highlighted that a key perception change is needed to move away from a university degree being the default next step for 17 and 18 year olds.
- One respondent commented that schools could work in partnership with colleges to deliver Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) and share the burden of the cost.
- A few responses highlighted that a learner's perspective is not always helpful in understanding what the economy needs the system to provide. But

conversely, others noted that whilst addressing skills gaps in broader society, there needs to also be the opportunity for learners to study what they enjoy.

Finally, one respondent highlighted that vertical progression is not always the right pathway. They commented that they thought schools push for pupils to be continually progressing up through the SCQF levels when for some staying at the same level for longer to consolidate learning may be more beneficial. Another highlighted the benefit of providing more targeted support in the senior phase to those individuals who may be more likely to leave without a positive destination.

Another theme that arose from engagement was that learner journeys are not always linear. There was a recognition from most respondents that depending on a learner's life stage and prior experience, the high quality learning opportunities that they require will differ. But many respondents felt that the system is not currently set up to enable a non-linear learner journey.

A range of views were reflected:
- Across the majority of the engagement, we heard that it is important for learners to have a clear view of their potential options given their starting point and interests, with many respondents highlighting that there should be clear pathways outlined with multiple entry and exit points. Most felt there were examples of where this was working but there was considerable room for improvement.
- University respondents particularly noted they can offer different learning styles and a variety of courses, but they also offer a fully immersive experience because many learners use it as an opportunity to move away from home for the first time. However, respondents clarified that it is important to recognise this is not suitable for all learners.
- To focus on lifelong learning, it is not just the learner journey of school leavers that needs attention, but also how to support those who may be returning to learning later in life. Respondents reflected that this support needs to help people prepare for transitions between school or work and college or university so that they have realistic expectations of the offer and ask.
- In addition, when moving into employment after university, we heard that some students struggle to articulate what they have to offer in the context of a specific employment opportunity. Students will often focus on the specific knowledge they have gained at university and not recognise the skills they have acquired which are relevant to the workplace.
- Many respondents highlighted that regardless of what stage someone is at in their learner journey, there are constant transition points and to move through these smoothly is important.

Increasing awareness of opportunities

The need to increase awareness of the full range of opportunities, was a significant topic of discussion for most respondents.

Many college-based responses discussed that to widen access to colleges specifically it is helpful to be able to show learners what college is like. Various points were made relating to the need to further promote colleges including:

- Greater partnerships between schools and colleges to allow seamless transitions for school leavers and those in senior phase.
- Colleges working more effectively with communities as often some of the biggest barriers to widening access is identifying the people who need access and the support they will need.
- Changing the perception that college is not where 'bright people go.'

Many responses also commented on the need to promote universities to students who are less likely to aspire to university. Various examples were provided for example, RGU have embedded 10 staff as part of the 'Hub School' pilot in high schools across the region to directly work with teachers and learners, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, on a sustained basis to raise aspirations and to support a positive journey to university.

There are various barriers to education, but as reflected in Principle 1, many responses highlighted the specific issue of inequity between access to full-time and part-time learning. It was highlighted that the needs of learners have changed over time and respondents felt that a default option of pursuing learning full-time is not possible for all learners.

Increasing awareness of opportunities was also identified as a responsibility for employers. Respondents reflected that there is a role for business to show young people what future careers could look like and that as there are roles in common across multiple industries there is the opportunity for employers to work together to promote themselves. However, it was also reflected that occasionally schools are not receptive to this offer.

Attainment and outcomes

Throughout our engagement we received comments about the reporting of outcomes. Many responses, particularly from colleges, commented that there have been negative connotations associated with leaving a course early. For example, it is important to recognise that if someone leaves a course midway through for a job, it is still a positive destination. Similarly, a few responses commented that year on year outcomes do not reflect where different cohorts of people are on their journey, and they may have simply paused learning for the time being rather than 'dropping out' completely. Several respondents' commented on the need to look at long-term outcomes when thinking about the value of spend on education and skills.

Policy development

As has been mentioned previously in this Principle, many respondents commented that there should be a change in the narrative around colleges to impact the perception of them not being 'as good' as universities. It was suggested by some respondents that Scottish Government would need to lead a change in culture with Ministers highlighting colleges as a successful outcome and a way for a learner to fulfil their potential.

The issue of stable policy and long-term sustainable funding was raised as a key issue in this Principle with respondents across all sectors reflecting that it is not

possible to respond flexibly and innovatively and deliver high quality without stable and sustainable funding. This issue is reflected throughout most of the responses we received with the criticism that policymakers do not look long term and do not consider who is best placed to deliver provision. Respondents felt that funding was proportionate based on an institution's size rather than being outcomes focussed or related to their ability to deliver. It was highlighted that there will be young people who want to go to university or college but are unable to do so due to the limited number of places for certain courses in certain institutions. Funding was also raised by employers as a specific issue for GAs, as companies said they struggled to recruit in the short window from April when funding is announced for a September start.

There were mixed views on competition with some respondents highlighting that it is important that policy changes affecting the system foster and reward collaboration rather than generating competition. However, other respondents commented that competition in the system can be healthy.

Career choices/informed pathways

It is clear from the responses that one of the key themes surrounding career choices is a need to increase awareness of what career opportunities exist and how to access the pathways to enter these careers.
- In reference to individual sectors, respondents highlighted that tourism/hospitality need to figure out how to attract an older population into their workforce; life sciences need to make people aware of the breadth of roles that exist; and energy and chemical sciences could benefit more from GAs as an alternative route.
- Regarding awareness, some responses highlighted that colleges could be better at their own PR to make it clear what they offer.
- It was highlighted that regional pathfinders could be a way to help people find opportunities, but this should be in collaboration with sectors promoting their own opportunities.

Many respondents also made the point that learner pathways are not always linear, for example going straight from school to university and then into a job. The responses highlighted the necessity to ensure that those on non-linear learning pathways are supported to access a wide range of opportunities. For example;
- Many responses commented that it is important to highlight the variety of pathways that are available including whether someone could benefit from remaining in education or work a little longer to consolidate the skills they have developed before moving into the world of work or education.
- Some respondents commented that the system would benefit from an exploration into ways people can convert their current skills, for example, 'top up' a computer science degree with a masters in cyber security. Likewise, an exploration into broadening the access courses that are available, for example, healthcare support workers being able to access a pre-registration programme allowing them to access a nursing degree.

Key Findings – Principle 3

- There is a need to increase awareness of what career opportunities exist and how to access the pathways to enter these careers.
- There is a need to provide clarity on how 'high quality' will be defined and what it will mean in practice as well as representations that what was currently on offer was high quality - we are not starting from a deficit position.
- Opportunities need to be available to all with recognition that senior phase is not currently utilised in the most effective way and there is an increasing need to support people returning to learning later in life.
- A variety of innovative teaching methods were currently utilised, but this was not always consistently applied nor well promoted to learners and there was a general view that there needed to be more opportunities to increase experiential learning and work-related skills.
- Delivery models and approaches were best determined by institutions who are in the best position to support student demographics and their requirements.
- System collaborations were improving transitions for learners including improved articulation and 2+2 degrees, but more could be done.
- Flexible funding models are needed to allow development of short courses and micro-credentials in order to upskill and reskill aligned to business needs.
- Learner journeys are not always linear, but the system is not currently set up to enable smooth transitions especially for a non-linear learner journey.

Principle 4 – Globally respected

Research, teaching, innovation and knowledge exchange undertaken in Scotland, must make a difference; enhance and contribute to global wellbeing, addressing 21st century challenges and attracting inward investment and talent to study, live and work in Scotland.

Language

Many respondents reflected that the benefits of global outlook are two-way and they were not convinced the current wording articulated that. They also questioned why the wording of the Principle focuses on research undertaken 'in Scotland' and not what happens by Scottish linked researchers or research institutions operating outwith Scotland. It was highlighted that this is unnecessarily limiting and has the potential to downplay the role that Scottish institutions have in contributing to research that takes place abroad. Finally, one response specifically questioned whether the Principle covered and reflected cultural, artistic, and creative international contributions as well as economic contributions.

Research capacity and funding

A key theme under this Principle was that the dual funding mechanism for research is critically important and universities should be further enabled to make decisions about how to prioritise research funding. However, many respondents are of the view that the funding model does not recognise the full cost of delivery and to succeed in

their aim of bringing more people into the research world, the current model needs to change. There were clear messages that the structural underfunding of core research and the challenges caused by the on-going inability to participate in Horizon funding all threaten the future research contributions of Scottish universities.

Respondents stressed that any erosion of baseline funding runs the risk of further developing key funding gaps between Scotland and other parts of the UK, reducing Scotland's ability to gain its share of the already competitive funding available and impacting on the sustainability of the sector. Some respondents noted that there needs to be wider awareness of how research is funded including that the majority of income and research funding comes from external sources. Similarly, they discussed the need for wider awareness that the research excellence that is prevalent in Scotland is partially funded by international students who are cross subsidising research.

Some responses commented that participation in excellent research should be a defining value of the sector, emphasising the important connection between research and educational outcomes and the greater opportunities that research-led teaching can open to students. As a result of this, some respondents highlighted that it would be a loss if research excellence was consolidated into a limited number of institutions. Other respondents however felt that with limited research funding it would make more sense to concentrate this into collaborative, research intensive institutions.

When discussing research, some respondents commented that it is important to consider the needs and/or capabilities of different parts of the system. It was highlighted that, for example, research intensive universities require long-term thinking and macro vision in their planning and failing to recognise this creates the risk of over-simplification.

Some responses commented that there is a need to drive explorations and push diversity in research themes. Similarly, it was highlighted that whilst international research is important, we cannot lose the national and local research that help us address key social problems here in Scotland.

International exchange, trade and partnerships

In terms of its global brand, many responses commented that Scotland achieves a lot for its size in comparison to other countries and that the research excellence that is prevalent in Scotland significantly contributes to its international attraction.

However, there were some areas for future improvement identified and, in particular, many responses commented on the importance of developing Brand Scotland to promote Scotland internationally. It was highlighted that the impact of the slide in overall UK reputation, particularly post-EU withdrawal, makes Brand Scotland even more important to help with promotion and differentiation. One respondent commented that those presenting at international conferences from Scottish institutions sometimes feel that Scotland is a 'bit shabby' in comparison to other countries.

However, respondents recognised that the global reputation of the sector is about more than just research and therefore this Principle needs to be about more than research. They proposed that it should also feature innovation, knowledge exchange and the ability to attract inward investment and talent. For example, most of the commentary around international standing is related to university research but some responses emphasised the role colleges can also have as anchor institutions and highlighted that knowledge exchange supports SMEs to grow successfully. Several respondents highlighted that there is a worry that colleges are only being asked to deliver for the regional or local economy, whereas in their opinion, they are preparing learners for the global economy too.

Finally, some respondents commented that being internationally respected was important but should not come at the expense of a system that delivers for Scotland.

Student and work visas

A key issue raised by many respondents related to international students who require visas to study in Scotland. Student visas are a reserved matter, administered by the UK Government. Respondents commented that it is crucial that there is consistency and predictability in the student visa regime. Universities are typically of the view that in order to mitigate the risks presented by EU withdrawal, investment needs to be made to support Scottish universities to grow their international student populations from a diverse range of markets. After completing their education, the ability to gain a post-study work visa will also impact on a potential international students' decision of whether to study in Scotland.

Key Findings – Principle 4

- Scotland achieves a lot for its size and the high skills, research excellence and impactful knowledge exchange that is prevalent significantly contributes to international attraction.
- The dual funding mechanism for research is critically important. Any erosion of baseline funding will impact on research excellence and the ability to lever additional competitive funding.
- Research intensive universities require long-term thinking and macro vision in their planning.
- There is opportunity to develop Brand Scotland to promote Scotland internationally
- International talent attraction is essential which requires greater consistency and predictability in the student visa regime.

Principle 5 – Agile & responsive

Everybody in the system collaborates and delivers in the best interests of Scotland's wellbeing economy.

Language

Principle 5, like Principle 4, raised some debate around the language used in the Principle. Some responses questioned whether this Principle showed enough ambition. For example:

- One respondent commented that they would have expected to see the economic imperative for change mentioned.
- Another commented that they were surprised not to see culture and society explicitly mentioned alongside economy.
- Some responses noted that the use of 'Scotland's wellbeing economy' is potentially narrowing and limits the Principle's scope of impact. Responses followed this up by highlighting that Scotland could lose its global standing in the sector if it is not equally as agile and responsive in a global scenario.

Many responses highlighted that it was unclear what the language of the Principle meant and that it was open to interpretation.

- One respondent commented that they presumed 'agile' was in reference to an organisation's willingness to collaborate and 'responsive' was in reference to timing but noted this is not clearly outlined.
- Other respondents highlighted that the Principle lacked understanding of the business model underlying provision of skills and training.
- One respondent notes that the outcomes expected need to be better defined and elaborated.
- Other comments noted that it was unclear if this ask would also be required of government and agencies.
- Some responses interpreted the Principle as meaning that every institution is being asked to be the same and create a homogenous system which they felt would be a mistake.
- Several respondents noted that a balance needs to be struck between the agility and responsiveness to short- and medium-term needs and a long-sighted view of skills planning and future knowledge requirements.

Shaping career aspirations and awareness

One key theme under this Principle was how to shape demand for the types of education and skills development needed to fuel the economy. A range of issues were raised by respondents including the need for lifelong learning, the need for occupational sector specific solutions, the need for better advice and less specialisation at school, and the need for greater flexibility in pathways.

Some responses commented that the aim of individuals pursuing lifelong learning needs to be seen as the norm.

Some responses commented on the tricky situations individuals face in various sectors. For example, it was highlighted that retail was a 'disrupted industry' and to be able to 'climb' in the sector, this is largely only possible if specialised in tech/AI. On a similar note, another example raised was the life sciences sector where respondents felt that there needs to be a greater awareness of what careers are available and that the industry itself could do more to communicate this.

Many responses noted that there is an issue apparent in schools about how careers are addressed.

- It was highlighted that schools are not offering the full array of careers advice. This has led to siloed thinking of individuals when they leave school.
- Many respondents noted that they had found schools difficult to engage with.
- More broadly, it was noted that because of the Curriculum for Excellence there is an aspect of specialising at age 10, potentially limiting careers early.

<u>Need for good collaboration</u>

There were mixed views about the extent to which effective collaboration happens at present despite most respondents concluding that it is crucial for there to be good collaboration in order to identify emerging trends, challenges and opportunities. It was highlighted that with strong collaboration would come greater awareness of the distinctiveness and/or differences that different parts of the system bring to education.

A lack of alignment across the system is a commonly held view and a key theme that appeared throughout responses to the Principles overall. Related to this it was highlighted that for collaboration to exist across the sector there needs to be alignment across government and agencies. An example that was given in a response was that the development arm and inspectorate arm of Education Scotland do not align well at present. It was also noted that in the DYW report it called for better alignment in the sector, but that this has not happened in practice.

A common theme that is apparent in most of the responses to this Principle is that the current funding streams are unsuitable and/or inefficient. These responses noted how a single funding pot for the sector would be more effective than the current mis-matched structure, noting that the current model of funding is inflexible. Some responses described the current funding model as restrictive, formulaic, and inflexible. The responses also highlighted that greater collaboration could be utilised to improve funding.

Some responses commented that despite the lack of apparent collaboration and alignment there are no barriers in attitude to collaboration and there is a generally held view that strengthening collaboration in the system is important and more valuable than creating competition.

Some responses commented on the difference in relationships between colleges and schools, and colleges and universities, noting that the latter have a more mature relationship. It was highlighted that there was a lack of cohesion across different Local Authority Directors of Education which has an implication on the equity of provision available to learners. With regard to schools, one response noted that it was largely the attitude of the senior leadership team in secondary schools that was the driver in the level of collaboration that is seen.

A few responses commented that greater collaboration would also have beneficial implications on the curriculum.
- It was highlighted that diversity and a degree of choice in the curriculum is good (and does exist, to an extent, already) and allows for diverse needs for different learners to be recognised and met, including supporting the options for part-time learning.

- Many respondents from the college sector noted that they are eager and willing to work with employers.
- Respondents from the university sector commented that they would welcome work related models of learning (such as micro-credentialling and GAs) that are properly resourced and administered. Similarly, they highlighted that more part-time programmes at postgraduate level could support the needs of both individuals and employers who are seeking to reskill and upskill.
- We heard that employers may view the subject matter studied at university as secondary to the value of the wider education which their future employees gain at university. Employers noted that often the domain knowledge needed can be learned 'on the job.'

Expectations and investment from employers

Many respondents commented on the successfulness of GAs and that this has been evident due to employers feeding back the benefits they have found from having a GA. It was also noted that in a lot of cases GAs are being used to upskill current employees. However, several respondents noted that GAs are not agile enough to respond to industry demands and that a wider range of GAs would be welcomed, for example in data or cyber. It was clear in the responses that the process for an employer to develop a GA scheme is unclear with terms such as 'not straightforward' and 'off-putting' quoted. From a university perspective, a respondent commented that there are no incentives for universities to develop GAs and emphasised that the Scottish Government should consider more flexible work-based learning models in addition to GAs. However, we also heard that as universities have degree awarding powers, they would like to be able to contribute more to GAs.

Some responses commented on the impact the current financial situation is putting on employers. It was highlighted that many SMEs are in 'survival mode' which means that identifying weaknesses in their workforce and encouraging opportunities for employees to upskill is not their priority. With this in mind, one response noted that in periods where there is a tight labour market it is normal to see recruitment criteria loosen. However, another response highlighted that a lot of employers look for the 'perfect' graduate which is not a realistic expectation. Additionally, it was highlighted that there is a risk in conflating a labour shortage with a skills shortage.

A respondent from the university sector highlighted that whilst universities can equip learners with skills, they are not training academies. They went on to note that it cannot be the expectation that universities and colleges alone will be able to train employees for jobs in the future.

Some respondents commented that it can be tricky to engage with employers as academic year timeframes and funding timescales are not conducive to short-and medium-term business needs or recruitment.

Effectiveness of skills planning

Many responses highlighted that collaboration is needed to help plan for and address skills challenges. It was highlighted that there are problems in how we articulate the skills of the future and work across different sectors to resolve issues.

One respondent went on to note that concern with skills planning is not because of the current financial crisis but it has been developing for upwards of 15 years.

Some responses commented that colleges and universities are not brought into the process of skills planning early enough and that it is seen that government has a role to play here in setting expectations of who should be included and when.

- Some responses highlighted that there is a need to be researching what new/emerging technology will be mainstreamed in 5/10 years so that we can identify what training is needed now. One respondent highlighted how Labour Market Intelligence should be used to a greater extent to inform skills planning. From a university perspective we heard that the uncertainty about the skills needed in the global economy in ten years' time means that institutions need to focus on teaching students how to learn, adapt and respond, as well as providing higher level technical and professional skills.
- A response highlighted that, in reference to the life sciences industry, there are roles in common across multiple industries and collaborating across industries would be beneficial to understand how to promote these opportunities and work collaboratively on harnessing skills for the future.
- Several responses commented that there is research needed into what GA's individuals would be interested in and what specific industry needs are in order to develop schemes to accommodate this.
- Many responses commented on the opportunity we have with planning for Net Zero. It was highlighted that the work could lead to a more skilled workforce if the skills planning is done right. However, concerns were voiced as to whether the skills planning is being done properly and how it links to future thinking.
- It was highlighted that skills planning is impacted by an apparent mismatch between where the funding goes and where the skills shortages are. It is not only a mismatch in funding but the restrictive funding model that is in place that limits the ability for reskilling/upskilling where it is most needed and would be most beneficial.
- During our engagement we were made aware of several examples of effective research, skills planning, collaboration and delivery. For example, the creation of the Tay Cities Engineering Partnership with Seagreen shows an example of addressing skills concerns; the Innovation Accelerator programme in the Glasgow City Region was put forward as an example of effective skills planning as was the Integrated Regional Employability and Skills Programme (IRES) which is backed by a £25 million investment over 8 years; and the launch of Scotland's International Environment Centre (SIEC), supported by the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal builds on the University of Stirling's global reputation for environmental science, and the Forth Valley's established status as a hub for environmental and conservation activity in Scotland. These are described further in case studies.

Some responses commented that there is a mismatch between the needs and wants of local economies and individuals. There should be a narrative that the local economy needs X, therefore everyone should be working towards X. This was highlighted by another respondent who emphasised the need for awareness of what the growth areas are in regions. For example, it was noted that a lack of STEM

teachers can impact the regional economy due to less provision being available for pupils to study and be successful in STEM subjects.

Some responses commented that there is wider public confusion about what work-based learning is, but there was a general view expressed that there was a need to ensure learners had work-related skills whether this was through developing additional transferrable skills, more work placements or greater experiential learning opportunities. A few responses commented that language skills are a particularly large gap in some industries, for example, tourism and hospitality.

Key Findings – Principle 5

- A careful balance needs to be struck between agility and responsiveness to the current economy's needs, and long-sighted commitment to developing the knowledge and skills that will be needed within a future economy.
- A range of issues were raised on how to shape demand including the need for lifelong learning, the need for occupational sector specific solutions, the need for better advice and less specialisation at school, and the need for greater flexibility in pathways.
- Occupational sectors can be very diverse in their challenges and opportunities.
- Mixed views about the extent to which effective collaboration happens at present despite most responses expressing willingness and concluding that it is crucial for there to be good collaboration in the sector to identify emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities.
- The current funding model is seen as restrictive, formulaic, and inflexible making it difficult to be aligned and responsive.
- Skills planning processes are not fully effective. There are unknowns around how best to articulate the skills of the future, but collaboration will be key.
- Many SMEs are in 'survival mode' and encouraging opportunities for employees to upskill is not their priority.
- Education and skills providers are not brought into the process of skills planning early enough and government has a role to play here in setting expectations of who should be included and when.
- Greater clarity is needed to reduce mismatch between the needs and wants of local economies and the desires of individuals.

Annex A

In November 2017, there was an independent review of student financial support in Scotland.

In May 2018, Scottish Government published the 15-25 Learner Journey Review. This review was established in 2016 to consider education provision for 16-24 year olds in order to improve the learner journey.

In 2019, Scottish Government commissioned Anton Muscatelli, Principal of Glasgow University, to examine and make recommendations for how Scotland's Universities could improve engagement with industry and boost contribution to economic growth. This was published in November 2019, The Muscatelli Report: Driving Innovation in Scotland – A National Mission .

A similar review was commissioned from Scottish Government to review the economic impact of Scotland's colleges resulting in the Feb 2020, Cumberford Little report, One Tertiary System: Agile, Collaborative, Inclusive. This report was 8 years after the publication of Putting Learners at the Centre: Delivering ambitions for Post-16 learning which initiated profound reforms in the college sector.

In 2019, Scottish Government also commissioned work to help develop a Young Person Guarantee for Scotland. Sandy Begbie's report was published in September 2020, Youth Guarantee – No-one left behind

Later in 2020, Scottish Government commissioned the Scottish Funding Council to undertake a review to examine the profound impacts of the COVID pandemic on the tertiary sector. This review of Coherence and Sustainability was published in July 2021.

One outcome of Begbie's *No-One Left* behind report was that SDS should consider how best a career service could operate from early years through until a young person enters employment. SDS subsequently undertook a review and in 2022 published Careers by Design.

In March 2021, Scotland's Future Skills Action Plan was published providing a thematic framework for re-focusing the skills system.

In June 2021, Ken Muir was commissioned by the Scottish Government to provide independent advice on aspects of education reform in Scotland. Specifically, this included 'designing the implementation of the recommendations for structural and functional change of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Education Scotland' which arose from the report, Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. It also considered establishing a new curriculum and assessment agency. Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education (ltl.org.uk).

In June 2023, James Withers published his review of the Skills Delivery Landscape; Fit for the Future: developing a post school learning system to fuel economic transformation. This review was being developed concurrently with the Purpose and

Principles work and the independently analysed Call for Evidence is particularly helpful in supporting understanding in developing the Purpose and Principles.

These were Scottish specific reports. Other relevant reviews were being conducted by the UK government which impact on the broader funding and political context particularly for Universities. This included the May 2019 result of an independent panel chaired by Philip Augar established to review provision by universities and colleges in England, Post-18 Review of education and funding.

- Aberdeen Foyer
- Abertay University
- Ayrshire College
- Borders College
- Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
- City of Glasgow College
- CLD Standards Council
- College and University Trade Unions including: UCU, Unison, Unite, EIS
- Colleges Scotland
- Confederation of Business and Industry (Scotland)
- Developing Young Workforce
- Developing Young Workforce Glasgow
- Developing Young Workforce Orkney
- Dumfries and Galloway College
- Edinburgh College
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Education Scotland
- Federation for Small Business
- Federation of Awarding Bodies
- Forth Valley College
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- Glasgow City Region
- Glasgow Clyde College
- Glasgow Kelvin College
- Industry Leadership Group
- Inspiring Young Voices
- Institute of Directors
- Irish Government
- Jo Turbitt, Colleges Development Network
- Joint Articulation Group
- Learning Link Scotland
- MillionPlus (Association for Modern Universities)
- New College Lanarkshire
- NHS Education for Scotland
- North East Scotland College Aberdeen
- North East Scotland College Fraserburgh
- Open University
- Poverty Alliance
- Robert Gordon University
- Ross Greer MSP
- Royal Society of Edinburgh
- SAAS
- Scotland's International Environment Centre
- Scottish Council for Development and Industry
- Scottish Electrical Charitable Training Trust

- Scottish Widening Access Programme
- Scouts Scotland
- SDS
- SFC
- Sparrows
- UK Government
- Universities Scotland
- Universities Scotland committees: Research & Knowledge Exchange, Learning and Teaching, International
- University of Aberdeen
- University of Dundee
- University of Edinburgh
- University of St. Andrews
- University of Stirling
- University of the Highlands and Islands
- University of the West of Scotland
- Welsh Government
- West College Scotland
- West Lothian College
- Youthlink Scotland