

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Scottish Government post-16 education purpose and principles

Nicholas Wright, Head of Public Affairs and Rob Mirante, Policy Officer

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[About the Purpose and Principles - Post-school education, research and skills - interim purpose and principles: discussion guide - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/about-the-purpose-and-principles-post-school-education-research-and-skills-interim-purpose-and-principles-discussion-guide)

1. MillionPlus is the Association for Modern Universities in the UK, and the voice of 21st century higher education. We champion, promote and raise awareness of the essential role played by modern universities in the UK's world-leading university system. We represent six modern universities located all across Scotland. Modern universities have a fundamental role in all local communities in Scotland, making higher education an option for people for whom it was previously out of reach.
2. A third of Scottish Universities are modern, and they account for 56% of full-time students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds and 68% of full-time mature students. Students articulating from college to university has widened access and progression within higher education. Forty-one per cent of first-degree students from the most deprived parts of Scotland come through the HNC/HND college-to-university pathway.
3. Seven out of every 10 students (70%) articulating into university moved into modern universities. Forty-two per cent of all care-experienced students were studying at a modern university in Scotland. The reach of Scotland's modern universities extends internationally, with 58% of undergraduate transnational education delivered by modern universities.

Principle 1: 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

4. MillionPlus believes that ensuring that tertiary education in Scotland and the UK is flexible, responsive to learners' needs, and able to support positive outcomes and transitions for students should be at the forefront of a post-school education system. It is important to maintain diversity and high quality in the tertiary education sector, as well as the need for appropriate financial support mechanisms to ensure that learners are not excluded from accessing education due to financial barriers. Not all university students are full-time undergraduate school leavers and there must be a flexible funding model in place that recognises this.
5. There needs to be clarity and consistency in policymaking, as well as collaboration between different parts of the tertiary education system. This aligns with a broader policy emphasis on creating a cohesive, integrated education system that enables learners to move smoothly between different levels of education and training, boosting student success.
6. This should be achieved alongside maintaining institutional autonomy and flexibility in responding to the specific needs of their student populations and academic disciplines. This would align with a broader policy emphasis on enabling institutions to experiment with different delivery models and approaches, while also ensuring that there are clear pathways to positive outcomes and destinations for learners.

7. Tertiary education in Scotland and the UK needs to be accessible, high quality, and responsive to learners' needs, while also promoting collaboration and innovation within the education sector. MillionPlus believes that there is currently a misalignment between principle one and the funding model currently in place and to achieve high quality opportunities at the right time and place for individuals there needs to be a more flexible funding and regulatory model which recognises this.

Principle 2: Supportive and equitable – people are supported throughout their learning journey, targeting those who need it most

8. MillionPlus believes that the Scottish Government should promote equitable access to education, with the opportunity to study at higher education level. The need for a flexible funding model that allows for upskilling and reskilling opportunities, and the importance of effective information, advice, and guidance to support students are crucial to supporting individuals through education pathways, in returning to education, and for meeting economic needs. Equitable access to higher and further education is impacted by schools and careers guidance provision, and these must not be looked at in silos.
9. MillionPlus believes that there is need for tailored support for disadvantaged students, tracking indicators of disadvantage to improve access, and targeted funding for special interest groups. It is important that these principles move beyond the traditional focus on full-time undergraduate school leavers and that the importance of outreach activities is established to increase awareness of higher education opportunities. This means ensuring that the current policy and funding model is adapted to enable equality of opportunity and the flexibility to target those who need support the most.
10. There needs to be a more supportive and equitable system that prioritises learners' ability to learn rather than their ability to pay. This includes re-evaluation of the levels of student living support available and reviewing financial support availability for non full-time undergraduate students. This must also be recognition of the importance of lifelong learning in adapting to the changing economy and world of work.

Principle 3: 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

11. MillionPlus believes that in responding to this principle there needs to be an emphasis on the importance of research excellence, sustainable funding models, and international education partnerships. There is a major need for government support to ensure that Scottish universities can continue to attract UK and international talent, maintain their reputation for high-quality education and research, and promote diversity and inclusivity. In 2020-21, modern universities provided contract research to over 400 organisations.
 12. Research excellence should be funded wherever it is found, and universities should have autonomy in pursuing their own mission-driven decisions. Currently, 57% of research that takes place at modern universities is judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent. The Scottish Government must ensure that there are sustainable funding models in place, which are essential to support the development
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of new and existing partnerships, to incentivise research excellence, and to attract UK and international talent.

13. It is also critical that the importance of international education partnerships and exchange is recognised. Collaboration and an emphasis on "place" can enable impactful research. MillionPlus believes that there is a need for the Scottish Government to strike a careful balance between outlining a strategic direction and giving universities the flexibility they need to develop their international education priorities and partnerships. The Scottish Government should also work with counterparts in Westminster to ensure that there is consistency and predictability in the student visa regime across the UK to maintain exceptional international student recruitment.
14. MillionPlus also believes that there is a real need for a funding model for teaching that recognises the full cost of delivery and corrects the structural underfunding of the current model. To do this the Government could increase the unit of resource per student, taking into account the impact of EU students no longer being eligible for funding, increase the unit of resource per student, and equalising funding access for part-time students. MillionPlus also believe that the Scottish Government should assess the fairness of research funding and look to replicate successful mobility schemes from other countries, such as Wales.
15. Modern universities form an essential part of the research ecosystem and have distinctive strengths to bring to the further strengthening and impact of research and innovation as evidenced in the REF results. Through their research, modern universities contribute to the development of health policy and practice, society, and technology, make a positive impact on social and health inequalities and the environment, as well as contributing to sustainable and inclusive growth in Scotland. Through partnerships their research is often co-created with the NHS, businesses, charities, governments, and the public, ensuring the relevance and the impact of what they do.
16. Overall, it is important to ensure that Scottish universities can continue to provide high-quality education and research, attract UK and international talent, and maintain their reputation for excellence

Principle 4: Agile and responsive – Everybody in the ecosystem collaborates and delivers in the best interests of Scotland's wellbeing economy

17. To tackle this principle it's important to consider the role of tertiary education institutions in Scotland's economic development.
 18. Modern universities are fundamental to the success of public services, with high numbers of students in education that lead to a position as a public services key worker. Modern universities have partnerships with all NHS Boards in Scotland and educate:
 - **100%** of nursing and midwifery students
 - **91%** of those studying nutrition
 - **70%** of those studying subjects allied to medicine
 - **61%** of undergraduate social work students
 - **72%** of nursing students
 - **83%** of counselling, psychotherapy and occupational therapy students
 - **100%** of those studying medical technology
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19. Modern universities also account for a third of all Scottish graduate startups and 39% of all social enterprises in higher education. Fifty-nine per cent of all graduate apprenticeships in Scotland are done at a modern university.
 20. Modern universities provided consultancy to more than 500 businesses in 2020–21, over half of which were SMEs. All modern universities provide entrepreneurship training and seed corn investment to support startups either on campus or through a partnership. It is estimated that, based on their expenditure, Scottish modern universities contribute over £1.2bn to their regional economies per annum and are responsible for over 9,000 jobs. Modern universities are responsible for 53% of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships being delivered by Scottish universities.
 21. Modern universities offer a broad portfolio, blending traditional subjects such as engineering, science, and healthcare, but also pioneering the offer of new and emerging subjects. The UK video games market was valued at £7.16bn in 2021, employing over 70,000 people, one of the fastest-growing sectors of the economy. The creative industries contribute £4.6bn to the Scottish economy, employing over 90,000 people, one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy.
 22. Modern universities educate:
 - **97%** of games students
 - **40%** of computer science students
 - **73%** of software engineering students
 - **68%** of design studies students
 - **37%** of drama students
 - **27%** of music students
 - **26%** of cinematics and photography students
 23. Agility and responsiveness are central to the way modern universities work and evolve, through building and maintaining strong external and internal partnerships which benefit our education, research and ways of working and through this contributing positively to the communities they serve.
 24. Industry and employer engagement is essential to support skills needs. The ongoing development of provision and academic portfolios at modern universities is informed by employers, professional accrediting bodies, labour market insight, and, where appropriate, Scottish Government workforce planning objectives.
 25. Universities play a crucial role in upskilling and reskilling the workforce and contributing to the National Performance Framework and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. However there is a need for greater employer engagement and consultation in apprenticeships and the creation of a Scottish micro-credential framework.
 26. Within the Skills Landscape Review, there is a need to provide clarity on the roles of different public sector agencies in upskilling and reskilling. The Government should consider the need for more flexible work-based learning models in addition to the valuable contribution made by current Graduate Apprenticeships while reviewing institutional funding and delivery in upskilling and reskilling.
 27. As previously mentioned, MillionPlus believes that to boost Scotland's wellbeing economy there is a critical need for flexibility in funding and regulatory models to allow institutions to respond to local, regional, national, and international requirements. Funding for new developments may not always best suit a formulaic distribution, and there should be greater opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. For
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example, autonomous institutions having the ability to develop bespoke graduate apprenticeships with employer partners to meet employer needs.

28. MillionPlus believes there is a need for a more flexible and responsive approach to tertiary education funding and delivery, with a particular focus on upskilling and reskilling. This should include employer engagement and consultation, recognising that this is essential to ensuring that graduates have the skills and experience needed to succeed in the workforce. There is scope for further collaboration and joint policy development between stakeholders in the tertiary education sector in Scotland.

Principle 5: Transparent, resilient and trusted – the ecosystem is well governed, inclusive, financially and environmentally resilient and trusted to deliver.

29. MillionPlus reiterates that any revised funding model must recognise the full cost of delivery and address the current structural underfunding of teaching and research. It must allow for investment in key priorities such as child poverty, wellbeing, and net zero, and recognise the essential contribution that each aspect of the sector makes to achieving these priorities.
 30. Greater flexibility in funding models would enable institutions to respond to shifting demands and prioritise the common good. Funding could be used in ways that better enable collaboration and teaching pooling between institutions. MillionPlus believes the Government should look at equalising funding access for part-time students.
 31. The importance of governance and trust in the sector should be recognised, with reference to the robust governance arrangements of Scottish universities and the global reputation of Scottish higher education currently. There is a need for transparency, resilience, and trust in the sector.
 32. A revised funding model that supports the delivery of high-quality tertiary education in Scotland, while also prioritising key societal goals and promoting collaboration between institutions should be the focus of these principles.
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