

Education, Children and Young People Committee

1st Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Wednesday 10 January
2024

Post School Education and Skills Reform

Introduction

1. The [Report of Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape](#) was published on 7 June 2023.
2. The Review, carried out by former Chief Executive of Scotland Food & Drink, James Withers, considered skills functions and the remits of Scotland's national public bodies, making 15 recommendations for future adaptations to support the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation.
3. At its meeting on [15 November 2023](#), the Committee took evidence James Withers on his report and its recommendations.
4. On [5 December 2023](#), Graeme Dey MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans gave a Ministerial Statement. In this statement, the Minister sought to outline the Scottish Government's current position in terms of its response to the Withers Review and in devising plans for post-school education and skills reform.

Committee meeting

5. At its meeting today, the Committee will take evidence from Graeme Dey MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans and supporting officials, to further explore the Scottish Government's response to the Withers Review and its plans for reform.
6. The Committee has also asked for the Minister to provide an update on the pilot programme which will inform the development of the Scottish Education Exchange Programme during the meeting.
7. This follows on from the Committee's last session with the Minister, on [21 June 2023](#), during which he highlighted the pilot programme and its purpose.

Supporting information

8. A SPICe Briefing, prepared for the session, is included at **Annexe A**.

**Education, Children and Young People Committee Clerks
21 December 2023**

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An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 10 January 2024

Post-school education

Introduction

This briefing has been prepared to support the Committee's evidence session with the Minister for Further Education, Higher Education; and Veterans Graeme Dey MSP.

The briefing covers recent developments relating to reform of the post-school education landscape.

Post-school education reform: Summary

The current programme of reform to the post-school education landscape began during the COVID-19 pandemic. Concerns around the future sustainability of college and university finances led the Scottish Government to commission the Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) 2021 [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#).

The resulting review report sets out recommendations for change to the FE and HE landscape. It calls on the Scottish Government to establish an overall vision and strategy for further and higher education, increase collaboration between colleges and universities and move to multi-year funding assumptions.

In the years following the 2021 election, further reviews have recommended reform of FE and HE.

The 2023 [Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape](#) carried out by James Withers sets out recommendations for transforming the skills delivery landscape. This review calls for the Scottish Government to:

- Take responsibility for skills planning at national level.

- Create a single funding body bringing together many of the functions of the SFC, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS).
- Introduce a universal skills framework with consistent language around qualifications.
- Develop a clear map of the post-school system to help learners navigate it.

The 2023 [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#) also sets out recommendations that impact on FE, HE and training, as does the [2020 review of the Scottish technology ecosystem](#) carried out by Professor Mark Logan and the [Entrepreneurial Campus report](#) by Ross Tuffee and Professor Joe Little.

Following the publication of these reviews, the Scottish Government published ‘[Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills](#)’ in June 2023. This is a framework intended to set the overarching policy direction for HE and FE.

Creating parity of esteem where all post-school learning pathways are valued equally is an aim of the Purpose and Principles framework and a recurring theme in the Skills Review. It looks likely that this will become a key element of policy in the years ahead.

The [Scottish Government’s Initial Priorities document](#) published alongside the Purpose and Principles document identifies development of a “a new model of public funding for all forms of provision”. As part of this, the possibility of delivering a single funding body for the sector – taking in student support and funding for institutions – will be investigated.

The Scottish Government also intends to take overall responsibility for skills planning, with more involvement from employers, a regional approach and a key role for colleges.

Reforms will also be aligned with reform of school education and the [Scottish Government’s National Strategy for Economic Transformation \(NSET\)](#). [NSET sets out priorities for the economic and workforce development up to 2032 and is discussed in a separate section of this briefing](#).

However, the reform of the skills landscape will be taking place at a time when budgets are constrained. Funding is explored further in the ‘Post-school reform funding’ section of this briefing.

Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape

In June this year, the [Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape](#) report was published. This review was carried out by James Withers, former Chief Executive of Scotland Food and Drink and NFU Scotland. Further information about the review and its findings can be found in the [SPICe briefing for the Committee’s 15 November 2023 meeting](#).

The review’s final report sets out 15 recommendations.

Five of these are structural, setting out reforms for the agencies involved in skills delivery. James Withers states in his report that the structural recommendations “form a package of public service reform, which, in my view, would need to be implemented in full” to be a success.

Structural recommendations are:

- Giving the Scottish Government responsibility for skills planning at national level. (Recommendation 3)
- Establishing a single funding body, bringing together many of the functions of SFC, SDS and SAAS. (Recommendation 5)
- Giving the new qualifications body a remit for development and accreditation of all publicly funded post-school qualifications, the underpinning skills frameworks and occupational standards. (Recommendation 8)
- Reform SDS to focus on development of a national careers service and embed careers advice within educational settings, workplaces and communities. (Recommendation 11)
- Giving the enterprise agencies a clear remit for supporting businesses with workforce planning. (Recommendation 13)

The remaining recommendations are operational. These include:

- New culture of leadership from Scottish Government. (Recommendation 1)
- The need for success in skills to be defined. (Recommendation 2)
- Establish areas of strategic workforce opportunity and need and empower regional partners to develop their own solutions (Recommendations 3 and 4).
- Building a new model of funding for post-school learning provision, taking in all learning pathways and flexible and part-time modes of study. (Recommendation 6 and 7).
- Reviewing post-school qualifications using SCQF as a foundation to create a universal skills framework with consistent language around qualifications at the same SCQF attainment levels. (Recommendation 9)
- Developing a new digital training record for learners to track their skills development throughout their lives. (Recommendation 10)
- Expanding the remit of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) to establish a national employer board, and to wind up the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB). This would mainstream apprenticeships and embed the principle of employer involvement in the learning system. (Recommendation 12)
- Exploring greater private sector investment in the post-school learning system, for example through in-work learning opportunities. (Recommendation 14)

- Developing a clear map of the post-school system to help aid understanding around qualifications and learning pathways. (Recommendation 15)

Chapter 5 of the review sets out how the recommendations will deliver on NSET, Purpose and Principles and other reviews and recommendations. James Withers states that the structure and governance of the skills landscape will be a vital element of success:

“I can't emphasise enough the importance of getting the structures and balance of responsibilities within the system right, alongside an agreed vision for success and a shared language. A well-structured and governed agency landscape will ensure that all the different parts of the landscape are working together in pursuit of shared goals, will be able to measure performance more effectively, and respond with evidence-informed action.” – [Skills Review Final Report](#)

James Withers states he believes:

- Recommendations 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12 and 13 will “provide the basis for the system to deliver on its ambitions for responsiveness and agility.”
- Recommendations 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13 will “provide a platform for learners and employers alike to invest in skills and training.”
- Recommendations 4, 9, 11 and 12 “should provide a greater basis for understanding the sectors and regions where talent from outside Scotland should be a priority, making targeted intervention more effective and possible”.

In evidence to the Committee on 15 November 2023, James Withers told Members:

“I think that cherry-picking elements of the review would worry me if it was driven by what might be expedient or felt easiest to do. I do not have a sense that that is where the Government is going from my discussion with ministers, but the reason why I positioned my findings as a coherent whole is that I was seeking to build a more coherent system. My overriding observation, having spent nine months inside the system, was the scale of fragmentation.” – [Official Report, 15/11/23](#)

James Withers said a ten-year timescale “is not unrealistic” for skills reform and establishing a definition of success and a vision for the system would be “absolutely critical”. However, he said that this would require the public sector to have “time and tolerance...but it rarely has either”. He added that results would not be seen quickly and this “could be pounced upon by those who resist change”.

James Withers spoke of a “window of opportunity to harness that cross-party consensus” on skills before the next election cycle, stating the changes would require a “strong ministerial stomach”:

“It is big reform. I have already seen parts of the system putting their defences up. Complex systems naturally evolve on their own. They have done that and there has not been sufficient ministerial direction of the system. Although such systems evolve on their own, however, they do not reform on their own. This reform will be difficult and lots of people will be able to say, “You can't do this because it'll do that,” so it will require real ministerial bravery to drive it through. I hope that cross-party consensus will make having that courage less fraught or perilous than it might otherwise seem.” – [Official Report, 15/11/23](#)

He added that “establishing a vision for what good looks like...should be the north star” so there is clarity about what the reform agenda seeks to achieve.

Sector response to review recommendations

Responding to the review following its publication in June 2023, [SDS said](#) it would “work constructively” with the Minister and others to consider the findings alongside the Hayward Review and Purpose and Principles.

[SFC said](#) the review made “recommendations to address long-standing issues”.

[Colleges Scotland stated](#) the review was “incredibly timely given the lack of sustainable funding for colleges”, adding that many of the review recommendations align with the [College Sector Statement of Ambition](#). Colleges Scotland also called for “a new culture of leadership - alongside Ministers working to change the system for the benefit of learners”

[Universities Scotland’s submission to the Committee](#) ahead of the 15 November evidence session with James Withers said there are actions that can be taken now to deliver for learners, without legislative change. The development of more agile models for funding work-based learning/ upskilling/ reskilling, more flexibility in the approach to graduate apprenticeships and early work to improve the support available to part-time and postgraduate learners were highlighted as areas where change could be made.

Universities Scotland stressed the need to ensure the skills agenda connects to other areas of universities, including research, innovation and entrepreneurship. It called for joined-up policy making from the Scottish Government in response to the Withers review, Purpose and Principles, the [Hayward review](#), [careers review](#), Tuffey review of entrepreneurial education and the [Innovation Strategy](#).

Universities Scotland stated that universities want one funding body to deliver funding for teaching and research, as SFC does now. It stressed its view that any new funding body should have NDPB status to ensure there was no risk of Office for National Statistics (ONS) classification change for universities, as if universities were to be classified as public bodies, this would “devastate their economic contribution and prevent universities from borrowing to invest”.

Steps toward reform

Following the appointment of Graeme Dey MSP as Minister for Higher Education, Further Education; and Minister for Veterans in March 2023 and the publication of the Independent Review of Skills in June 2023, the Scottish Government has begun to set out the steps toward reform. These include:

- The Purpose and Principles framework and accompanying Initial Priorities document was published in June 2023;
- On 5 December 2023, the Minister gave a statement updating Parliament on a number of areas related to post-school reform.

These are explored in more detail under the headings below.

Purpose and Principles

Following the publication of the Independent Review of Skills, in June 2023, the Scottish Government published a [‘Purpose and Principles framework’](#) for further and higher education. Work on this framework initially began in 2021 following the SFC review’s call for an overarching statement of ambition for the sectors.

The Purpose and Principles framework is intended to set the sectors’ long-term policy direction. There are five principles:

- **Transparent, Resilient and Trusted:** The system is financially and environmentally resilient; trusted to deliver, and subject to effective governance.
- **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.
- **Supportive and Equitable:** People are supported throughout their learning journey, particularly those who need it most.
- **Globally Respected:** Research, teaching, innovation and knowledge exchange undertaken by Scotland, must make a difference; enhance and contribute to global wellbeing, addressing 21st Century challenges such as the climate emergency and attracting inward investment and talent to study, live and work in Scotland.
- **Agile and Responsive:** Everybody in the system collaborates to deliver in the best interests of Scotland’s wellbeing economy.

Progress will be measured using a series of short, medium and longer term system outcomes. Long term outcomes are contained in the Scottish Government’s [‘Evidence Report on the Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills’](#) published in December 2023.

The [Initial Priorities document](#) published alongside the framework accepts a number of the recommendations made by the Independent Review of Skills. During his [appearance at the Committee on 15 November 2023](#), James Withers said the framework and document were “really helpful” and start “to set out some of the values that we are trying to embed in the whole learning system”.

The document sets out first steps the Scottish Government will take toward actioning the recommendations. Steps identified include: the Scottish Government taking on responsibility for skills planning and the building of a regional approach; exploration of the development of a new single funding body; improving careers advice and education; reviewing student support for part-time learners and also to ensure it takes account of all learning pathways including apprenticeships.

Ministerial Statement on Post-school reform

At the time of writing, the Scottish Government has not given a direct response to each of the 15 recommendations contained in the Independent Skills Review. However, on Tuesday 5 December 2023, the [Minister gave a statement](#) updating Parliament on the progress of post-school reform plans.

During the statement, the Minister emphasised he wanted to invest time in getting the approach to reform right, believing that do so “will pay dividends further down the line”.

He also signalled that considerations would aim to balance the needs of the economy and the needs of learners, identifying two key elements of the post-school system:

- It must give people the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential throughout their lives.
- It must enable research, innovation, and knowledge exchange underpinning Scotland’s competitiveness.

The Minister said that a Tripartite group between government, SFC and college principals has been established to improve direct engagement. In addition, representation from university and college principals will be sought for the [Ministerial Group on Education and Skills Reform](#) that will be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills Jenny Gilruth.

The Minister also said a regional approach to skills planning with direction provided by the Scottish Government at national level would be taken. This is in line with the recommendations of the Independent Skills Review.

On apprenticeships, the Minister said there was further room to develop Graduate Apprenticeships and to give colleges “an even more instrumental role” in Modern Apprenticeships.

On a single funding body, the Minister said:

“James Withers called for the creation of a single funding body and we do not rule that out. As an initial step, I am today committing to bringing together learner support funding into one place, and funding for apprenticeship provision into one place.” – [Official Report, 5/12/23](#)

The Minister also stated that “public funding alone will not be enough”, and roundtable discussions with businesses were already being held on this point and “we must look at where business can go further to support the system and learners.”

During questions, the Minister was asked about the role of the Developing the Young Workforce National Employers’ Forum and the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board’s (SAAB). The Independent Skills Review recommended SAAB should be wound up in order to aid the mainstreaming of apprenticeships, but the Minister did not state whether this recommendation will be taken forward.

On the timescales for change, the Minister said that a timeline of reforms for Parliament and stakeholders will be provided as soon as possible.

In response to a question on the role of employers, the Minister said the government aims to embed the role of employers in “all aspects of the skills system”, including planning, training, course provision, qualifications and careers services. He added:

“...as part of our national skills planning approach, I am asking my Government colleagues to identify our national economic and social priorities across portfolios, engage with employers to identify skills needs that are relevant to those priorities—

not just the numbers of people who are required—and engage with training and education providers to understand how we can meet those needs.” - [Official Report, 5/12/23](#)

The Minister was also asked about financial pressures facing colleges. He said that while there were financial challenges facing colleges, he did “not recognise at all the representation that the college sector is broken”.

On the role of SDS, the Minister said it remained an “integral part” of the system, and it was “too early to speculate” on exactly what changes will be made to the public body landscape.

The [Minister also wrote to the Committee](#) to set out the policy elements of the statement. The letter set out:

- Further confirmation that the Scottish Government will take on responsibility for national skills planning.
- A commitment in principle to bring learner support funding and funding for provision, including apprenticeship provision, into one place. This work will be led by Scottish Government officials working closely with SFC, SDS and SAAS. While no timescale has been given, the letter stated it “will take some time”. This work will also look at how apprenticeships can “better reflect economic and learner needs”.
- A review of current Community Learning and Development (CLD) provision and where it will fit within the reformed landscape will be led by Kate Still. This will report in June 2024.
- The [Careers Collaborative](#) will continue its work to develop a “clearer, more coherent focus” for national careers services. Grahame Smith will continue in the role of Chair of this group.

Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD)

Community Learning and Development (CLD) provides lifelong learning opportunities with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention for those at risk of or experiencing inequality of opportunities within the education and skills system.

CLD can provide opportunities for learners with few or no qualifications, those who require help to engage in learning and those who face personal, social and systemic barriers to learning.

Councils have a statutory duty to secure “adequate and efficient provision” of further education. This is set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013 set out the definition of CLD, requirements around securing and maintaining provision and a requirement for each local authority to publish a 3-year plan containing information about CLD provision in the area.

Recent reviews have touched on the role of CLD in post-school education reform:

- The [Independent Review of Skills](#) highlighted the need to focus on those who face barriers to education, ensuring they can receive support out with the education system.
- The [Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment](#) recommended that every learner should have opportunities to take part in social, cultural, well-being and economic activities.
- The [Muir Review of Scottish education](#) emphasised the need for professional development for teachers and practitioners. The report also recommended the CLD Standards Council, currently embedded within Education Scotland, should remain part of the new proposed national agency for Scottish education.

During his 5 December statement, the Minister said he was “not as clear as I want to be about how effective our current approach [to CLD] is”. He announced an [independent review of CLD](#), looking at its role within the reformed post-school education landscape.

The CLD review will be led by Kate Still. Kate Still began her career as a teacher and youth trainer and is a former Director for Scotland for the Prince’s Trust. She has also previously held Director roles with Rathbone and Wise Group and is a former Chair of Employment Support Scotland. She is a current Fellow of the Institute of Employability.

The review is now underway and is expected to report in June 2024. It will consider:

- The skills and career pathways of the CLD sector workforce, hearing the views of staff and volunteers directly impacted by any changes.
- Available evidence on current provision of CLD services, their impact on learners and any appropriate international perspectives.
- How data across the CLD sector is gathered, measured and used for the best possible outcome for learners.
- Connections across the wider policy landscape and Scottish Government priorities, and alignment with the Purpose and Principles framework.

Evidence will be gathered via face-to-face consultations with learners and potential learners, key stakeholders and partners across the CLD sector. An online consultation will also be held.

In response to the announcement of a review, the CLD Standards Council welcomed Kate Still’s appointment, stating:

“The CLD Standards Council is of the view that this is an appropriate time for such a review within the context of the major reforms proposed for the Scottish Education system.” – [CLD Standards Council news release, 5/12/23](#)

Post-school reform funding

Reform of the skills landscape will be taking place at a time when budgets are constrained. The [2022 Resource Spending Review](#) set out a flat-cash settlement for colleges and universities up to 2026-27. While an additional £20m for universities and £26m for colleges

was initially allocated to revenue budgets in the 2023-24 Budget, this increase was later reversed.

Then, in November 2023, [Deputy First Minister Shona Robison wrote to the Finance Committee](#) to set out further in-year budget changes for 2023-24. This included £56m of savings across demand-led programmes at SFC. The letter stated:

“Projected lower spending than forecast across a wide range demand-led programmes has enabled the accumulation of potential savings up to a value of a further £56m with no direct equality or fairness impacts on any individual programme identified.” – [DFM letter to Finance Committee, Annex B](#)

In total, savings identified across the 2023-24 college and university resource budgets see colleges and universities receive £102m less than what was initially allocated to them in December 2022.

The 2024-25 Budget was published on 19 December 2023. This set out a decrease in resource budgets for 2024-25 and an increase in capital budgets. College and university (HE) resource and capital allocations for 2022-23 to 2024-25 are set out in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: HE and FE Resource and Capital Budgets

	2022-23 Budget £m	2023-24 Budget £m	2024-25 Budget £m
HE Resource	789.2	809.2	760.7
HE Capital	348.0	340.7	356.9
Net College Resource	675.7	701.7	643.0
Net College Capital	74.7	82.4	84.9

Source: [Scottish Budget 2024-25](#), Table A5.07 Scottish Funding Council Spending Plans (Level 3)

Please note, the resource budget figures in Table 1 for 2023-24 **include the additional £20m for universities and £26m for colleges initially allocated to revenue budgets**. Using these figures:

- **Resource funding for universities** has fallen by £48.5m between 2023-24 and 2024-25 Budgets. This figure reduces to £28.5m if the £20m funding reversal for 2023-24 is taken into account.
- **Capital funding for universities** has increased by **£16.2m** between 2023-24 and 2024-25 Budgets.
- **Net resource funding for colleges** has fallen by £58.7m between 2023-24 and 2024-25 Budgets. This figure reduces to £32.7m if the £26m funding reversal in 2023-24 is taken into account.

- **Net capital funding for colleges has increased by £2.5m between 2023-24 and 2024-25 Budgets.**

University sector

Responding to the publication of the 2024-25 Budget, [Universities Scotland said](#) it was a “a tough budget for higher education” which would mean “some inescapably hard choices for universities” due to falling Scottish Government funding and uncertainty around income from international students as numbers fall.

In [Universities Scotland’s submission to the Committee](#) ahead of James Withers’ 15 November 2023 evidence session, sustainability of funding for universities was highlighted as a key requirement of skills reform. The submission stated:

“The core problem faced by institutions isn’t the funding methodology, it’s the chronic under-funding of each Scottish-domiciled student and the over-reliance on cross-subsidy from international fees (as Audit Scotland has previously warned) which is now baked-in to the Scottish Government’s funding model for home students. The priority needs to be investment at sustainable and competitive levels. We cannot support simplicity in a single funding model at the expense of supporting excellent higher education provision in a way that reflects its cost.” - [Universities Scotland submission, November 2023](#)

College sector

[Audit Scotland’s report Scotland’s Colleges 2023](#) was published in September this year and highlighted risks to the sector’s financial sustainability. It stated that the sector’s adjusted operating surplus for 2021-22 was likely to be “considerably less” than its surplus of £19.3m the previous year.

The report found staffing costs making up more than 70% of college expenditure, with staff pay awards, increasing employers’ pension contributions and the outcome of a job evaluation exercise among the factors contributing to increasing costs.

It also found many colleges spent money on voluntary redundancies to reduce staff costs in the longer term, with some colleges anticipating the need for further staffing reductions. Audit Scotland states further reductions could “severely erode [colleges’] ability to deliver a viable curriculum”.

The Public Audit Committee held evidence sessions on the Audit Scotland report on 26 October and 30 November 2023. [During the 26 October session](#), Auditor General Stephen Boyle said “the viability of the college sector is challenged”. He added:

“...in order to address that challenge, the Government and the Funding Council need to have a clear plan for what the future model of provision looks like.” – [Official Report, 26/10/23](#)

[During the 30 November session](#), there was discussion of the number of colleges expected to be in a deficit position in the next financial year. Derek Smeall of Glasgow Kelvin College, representing the College Principals Group, said while he had not spoken to all college principals about this, the ones he had spoken to said “they post a deficit position”.

Stuart Brown of the EIS expressed concern about the framing of staff costs as a financial pressure, stating “staff are [colleges’] greatest and most important resource”, and that the sector was “contracting” meaning it will “deliver less”.

Stuart Brown also said that the EIS was not consulted during the Independent Skills Review, and he found the “acceptance of the direction of travel that was set out by Withers to be concerning”.

There was also discussion around the Independent Skills Review recommendation of an increased role for business investment in the skills system. With EIS, UNISON and NUS Scotland raising concerns that private investment in the college sector may make it more difficult to achieve Scottish Government aims.

On new funding flexibilities given to colleges in the past year, Andrew Witty of Colleges Scotland said his organisation wanted to see these flexibilities embedded, but the “more fundamental point is about examining the underlying funding model” and considering fundamental changes.

The College Principals Group said the flexibilities were “very minor”, while EIS said it was not clear what the impact will be.

During his evidence session with the Committee on 15 November 2023, James Withers described the college sector as a “jewel in our crown” but a “burning platform in relation to finance and sustainability”. He added:

“I worry that we might see a more chaotic reorganisation of the sector, based on the law of natural selection—who is most vulnerable, who might fall and who might not—which might need to be looked at in time.” – [Official Report, 15/11/23](#)

James Withers said that he did not think the problem facing the college and university sectors was underinvestment, but duplication and inefficiency in the system. He added that “more can be done to release some of the shackles”, for example by giving universities freedom to decide how much of their funding to allocate to graduate and degree apprenticeships.

Scottish Education Exchange Programme

In May and June 2023, the Committee held evidence sessions on the proposed Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP). This is the Scottish Government’s proposed replacement scheme for Erasmus+. For further information on SEEP please see SPICe briefings for the Committee’s [24 May 2023](#) and [21 June 2023](#) meetings.

In the run up to Brexit, the Scottish and Welsh Governments [called for the UK to remain a member of Erasmus+](#). However, a deal was not reached on continued participation and the UK no longer participates. The [European Commission said](#) that the UK could only associate to the scheme as a “whole, or not at all”.

In December 2020, the [UK Government announced the Turing Scheme](#) would offer opportunities for UK students to study and work abroad from September 2021. The scheme is open to Scottish institutions but it does not fund students from abroad to study in the UK as Erasmus+ did. [University representatives have also highlighted](#) Turing requires

institutions to make bilateral agreements on joint exchanges, whereas Erasmus+ was an organised scheme.

In 2022, the [Welsh Government launched the Taith international learning exchange programme](#). The Scottish Government has said it will replace Erasmus+ with a Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP).

In a [letter to the Committee in June 2023](#), the Minister stated SEEP would focus on addressing gaps in the Turing Scheme, such as the participation of youth programmes, adult learners and community learning.

Giving evidence to the Committee in June 2023, he said he expected a pilot project to start in the coming months and that he expected “the Government to be at the forefront of funding” SEEP.

The 2023-24 Programme for Government committed to:

“Launch a new Scottish Education Exchange Programme – building on an initial test and learn project that we are delivering in 2023-24, prioritising placements for disadvantaged groups and further demonstrate our commitment to EU and global partnerships with schools, colleges and universities including through working with these sectors.” – [2023-24 Programme for Government, Scottish Government](#)

A [Written Answer in September 2023](#) stated a test and learn project group including representatives from colleges and universities “is expected to meet regularly over the next six months”.

Lynne Currie, Senior Researcher (Further and Higher Education), SPICe Research

20 December 2023

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