

Fife and Tayside Wider Access Forum Responses to consultation on review of Forums

1. Proposed Remit

- a. *Do you agree with the proposed remit of the Forums as set out in the consultation paper?*

One respondent felt that the funding allocated to the Forums would be better spent on funding additional college places and supporting colleges to take the lead in partnership working. All other respondents were in agreement with the proposed remit of the Forums without qualification, two specifically mentioned promotion of SCQF, one respondent suggested that the words innovate and challenge should feature and that Forums should not simply promote but lead on developments in widening participation.

- b. *How should stakeholders other than colleges and universities be represented on the Forum and what form should this representation take?*

One respondent felt that having other stakeholders on the Forum would lead to focus being lost and funding diluted. Of the others, two respondents felt that local authorities should serve on the Forum Executive and all felt that there should be no restriction on associate membership of the Forum. There was no clear consensus on whether projects could be led by partners other than colleges and universities.

- c. *The geographical boundary of the Forum is the area defined by the local authority areas of Perth and Kinross, Dundee City, Angus and Fife. How best should institutions and organisations that work across more than one Forum area be represented?*

Most respondents felt that cross boundary work was desirable and it should be role of the Forum manager to ensure that this was carried out effectively. One respondent felt that partners should only have full membership of one Forum and observer status on any others in which it had an interest. Another felt that those partners with observer status should be able to fully participate in funded programmes but not lead them. The LIFT-OFF schools management group was quoted as a good example of effective cross Forum working.

- d. *Do you have any comments on the proposed activities that the Forum should support?*

One respondent felt that these were activities that colleges and universities should already be doing and the only valid one for targeted joint working is FE/HE articulation. Other respondents felt that the Forum currently supports a wide range of projects and there was consensus that the proposed activities are appropriate. One respondent also wished to see some emphasis on transition within colleges as well as from college to university. One local authority respondent expressed concern that the Forum did not fund support costs for students on access summer schools.

2. Funding

- a. *Do you support the funding arrangements outlined?*

One respondent felt that the bulk of the funding should go to colleges to support their widening access agenda with universities being able to apply for some funds when they can show real added value to the agenda. All other respondents either strongly agreed with or welcomed the proposed two year rolling programme of funding. Comments included ability to sustain learning opportunities and progression, long term planning and stability.

3. Governance and management

- a. *Do you have any comment on the proposed governance and management arrangements?*

One respondent felt that the Forum should become an independent organisation, however accepted that funding through a host institution was the preferred option. The introduction of guidelines was welcomed by two respondents. All others agreed with the proposed arrangements for governance and management. One respondent felt it was important to have access to funding council and other national information to achieve maximum impact.

- b. *Do you have any views on staffing arrangements for the Forum?*

All respondents agreed that the Forum needed to be staffed with management and support staff. There were a variety of comments on how this might be done. One respondent felt that the need for staff arose from the creation of Forums and that this was an inefficient use of resources. One respondent felt that an excellent team has been built up but that in future to avoid problems over differing terms and conditions it might be better for all staff to be employed by the host organisation. One respondent queried whether it is possible to create permanent posts when the funding is not core funding for any one institution. One respondent suggested that the managerial and administrative costs should be at an agreed fixed percentage of the funds to be allocated.

- c. *How should the host institution be selected?*

A number of suggestions were offered. These included consultation with stakeholders, a tendering process, open agreement with full members (colleges and universities), by consensus of Forum Executive taking account of feedback from full Forum. Other areas to be taken into account included history, willingness, availability of space, location of Chair, local needs and circumstances, flexibility and avoidance of an overly bureaucratic approach to the role.

4. Strategic level national group

- a. *Do you have any comment on the role and remit of the proposed national group?*

There was a wide range of views expressed on this subject. Two respondents felt that the group as proposed would be too large and cumbersome and would become a talking shop. If such a group is required, it should be smaller (limited to 12/15) and vice chairs of Forums omitted. Other respondents welcomed the proposal for a strategic level national group. A number of suggestions with regard to membership were offered. Learndirect Scotland would welcome being represented on the group. Other suggestions included SFEU, ASC and SUALL. One respondent suggested that Universities Scotland, ASC and NUS should not be members. One respondent queried how the Scottish Executive was to be represented and also suggested that expertise from specific areas, e.g. schools and communities, would be better utilised as associate members or on an ad hoc basis. One respondent suggested that a practitioners network should also be set up to provide opportunities for sharing of good practice.

Responses from:

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Elmwood College
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