

SUALL

Scottish Universities Association
for Lifelong Learning

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Report on activities 2007/08

Context

The work of SUALL in session 2007/08 was driven in some ways by the various reports emanating from the Scottish Government. SUALL Council has attempted to take a strategic approach in positioning the Association as a key player in the Government's developing plans.

A number of members continued to be under pressure to justify the existence of CE/LL departments and the work they do, as it does not fit with many university strategic plans, which are mainly driven by the need to increase postgraduate numbers, overseas students and average entry tariff scores. Our work does not appear to be valued by many institutions although it fits very well with Government priorities.

SUALL Council noted that the "Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy" document did not have much to say about the role of universities, concentrating more on college progression routes. It was felt that SUALL therefore needed to be proactive and a paper was thus sent to Mark Batho, Director of Lifelong Learning for the Scottish Government, indicating how universities could help the Government to implement the strategy, in areas such as flexibility, employer engagement, work-based learning, although it was noted that the sector was not homogeneous.

Alex MacLennan (Chair) and Lesley Hart (Vice Chair) subsequently met with Mark Batho. The meeting was very positive, with Mark confirming that the Minister's view of the skills strategy was that it covered cradle to grave and that the adult learning part was therefore very important. Mark reported that the draft report of the Universities Taskforce (see below) did not mention lifelong learning and felt that it was therefore important for SUALL to be represented at the stakeholder meeting being held in August: subsequently attended by both Alex and Lesley.

He also promised to set up a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop, but as he shortly afterwards took up the post of Chief Executive Officer of the Scottish Funding Council it was not clear if this would now take place.

The Joint Future Thinking Taskforce on Universities published its interim report "New Horizons: responding to the challenges of the 21st century" on 24th June.

The main recommendations of the report were:

- Scotland's universities should become the seventh key sector given their priority position within the Government Economic Strategy and in recognition of their significant contribution to the country's economic, cultural and social wellbeing
- In return for the substantial public funding they receive, universities must clearly demonstrate that Government funded activities are aligned with the Government's

purpose of delivering higher levels of sustainable economic growth for the benefit of all

- A new tripartite relationship between the university sector, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council - a collaboration driven by a shared goal to deliver an internationally competitive 'Smarter Scotland'.
- A new funding arrangement comprising a General Fund for Universities (GFU) to cover all Scottish Government-funded mainstream activities, including teaching and research; and a Horizon Fund for Universities (HFU) which would be initiative/project led and used to support capacity building in priority areas.
- The crucial role of the SFC in delivering key strategic initiatives developed in partnership with universities; however, future regulation by the SFC would be *significantly* more relaxed and a new lighter touch approach would be used to manage its relationship with HEIs.
- Importance of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the need for flexibility of entry into university - eg the relationship with colleges and encouraging the development and use of articulation routes.
- Importance and desirability of having a diverse HE Sector in Scotland - and greater emphasis on collaboration (short of merger).
- The Scottish Government's insistence of delivery: outcomes; securing 'something for something'.

The SFC would undertake a full review of the Council's own processes to help prepare it for its new role in governance and funding of HEIs. This review would also take account of the New Horizons report and feedback gained from the stakeholder groups. In particular, the SFC Review would look closely at the SFC's operating style, its practices and business processes, and its approach to funding, funding methodologies and their implementation. The revised New Horizons report will be finalised and published with the aim of achieving implementation in time for the start of academic year 2009/10.

Office bearers in 2007/08:

Chair: Alex MacLennan (University of the West of Scotland)
Vice-Chair: Lesley Hart (Strathclyde)
Secretary: Theresa Hoare (Glasgow)

SUALL Council met three times during the year.

Sub-Committees

The work of the sub-committees has been invaluable in pushing forward various parts of Scotland's Lifelong Learning agenda. The sub-committees were:

Management and Administration of University Lifelong Learning (MAULL)

Convenor: Donald Paterson (Aberdeen) Secretary: Marion Judge (Edinburgh)

Widening Participation in HE

Convenor: Fiona Andrews (Glasgow) Secretary: Helen Martin (Glasgow Caledonian)

Research

Convenor: Pete Cannell (OU) Secretary: Mike Allardice (Dundee)

KILTS (Knowledge, Information, Learning, Training and Skills)

Convenor: Colin Thorne (Strathclyde) Secretary: Lea McKay (UWS)

The **Management and Administration** sub-committee dealt with issues of common concern such as tuition fees, marketing, tutor payments and training. In particular it continued to have dialogue with Government representatives eg to discuss the proposal that a grant of £500 for part time students be introduced for session 08/09, replacing the current loan. This will be administered under a simplified ILA model and be available to all students earning less than £18,000 and taking at least 50% of a full time load. Some operational issues were identified and a small working party was formed to discuss this further before the scheme was finalised. £1M of hardship funds would also be ring-fenced for part-time students.

The **Widening Participation in HE** sub-committee were concerned about the way HESA will in the future be producing low participation reports as the new Polar 2 methodology does not take account of Scotland-specific census data. It is expected that a number of institutions who are currently well above their benchmark will fall dramatically below it.

Decisions were made on the projects to be funded under Phase 3 Forum work. (There are four regional forums established to take forward social inclusion and widening access. They are core funded by the Scottish Funding Council and are collaborative ventures between Further and Higher Education Institutions, schools, Local Authorities and other relevant organisations.) Several projects were discontinued and a lot of changes requested of others. The late announcement of the funding gave rise to problems with having the new structures and staffing in place in time.

At the end of March, the SFC announced its funding for improving articulation from HN to degree courses. This followed a consultation process held after the publication of the *Articulation for All?* report and led to a re-focusing of the resources to those universities who are demonstrably the most active in the field - excluding the OU (Scotland), just five universities provide 90% of all articulation. These five (conveniently distributed around the country) have been tasked with bringing together the relevant colleges and other partners (including other HEIs) in their region. The Council will discuss with each regional consortium the outcomes they will aim to achieve and how they propose to use the funding.

The **Research** sub-committee struggled to keep members involved so would look at video and web conferencing options as well as opening up membership to English institutions and people from other disciplines. The group had run a seminar on Effective Research Interview Techniques which had been oversubscribed, so may be run again. One of the meetings of the research group had been held in parallel with a seminar at Glasgow University on "The Imagined Future: Adult and Lifelong Learning Research in Scotland", where the speakers were John Leavey from Learning Connections and Brenda Morgan-Klein from the Institute of Education at the University of Stirling. Pairing up with other organisations to run seminars was seen as a good option for the group to pursue. It was noted that a number of people were interested in doing research but needed a community to be involved with.

The **KILTS (Knowledge, Information, Learning, Training and Skills)** sub-committee held its inaugural meeting in January. There was a feeling within the group that CPD was being under-reported by their institutions. Efforts would be made to reach the relevant people in each institution, particularly those working in research and innovation offices. A very good presentation was given to the group by Bill Harvey, Director of Teaching and Learning at the Funding Council, on Knowledge Transfer and CPD.

Other Activities

A joint UALL/SUALL Conference was held at the Edinburgh College of Art on the theme of *Challenges for Lifelong Learning in the UK's Changing Demographic Landscape*

Departures

We are sorry to report that we have lost yet more members from Dundee. Viv Urquart and Mike Allardice are both no longer working in Lifelong Learning. Julie McAndrews has left Aberdeen, Hazel Knox has retired from UWS and Dorothy Christie from Stirling. Brian Findsen returned to New Zealand after a relatively short stint at Glasgow. All of them made significant contributions to the work of SUALL and will be missed. It is slightly worrying that we are losing many more active members than we are gaining.

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We expect our discussions in 08/09 to be driven by the review of the Funding Council and the run up to the 'New Horizons' implementation. Given the current antagonism of many institutions to CE/LL work we anticipate some battles to secure our place in the new scheme of things.

Theresa Hoare
October 2008