

Foreword



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Chair



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Learning, research and innovation are at the heart of the Scottish Government's purpose and its National Performance Framework. Scotland's colleges, universities and other higher education institutions have a critical role to play in supporting and improving Scotland's economic, civic, social and cultural life. In the current period of economic downturn, that contribution has never been more important.

The Scottish Funding Council is in a unique position to be able to invest strategically in provision in the college and university sectors. It is able to do so in ways which support and enable colleges and universities – individually and collectively – to deliver programmes of study that offer coherent, high quality provision for learners across Scotland and in ways which support universities to undertake world-class research.

We promote and invest in further and higher education that sits within a lifelong learning environment – taking full account of the Scottish Government's *Curriculum for Excellence* agenda – that includes schools, community learning, private training providers and the workplace. We support the delivery of learning programmes in colleges and universities that provide smooth and flexible progression into and through further and higher education – and we invest strategically to maintain Scotland's international reputation for educational excellence in teaching and research.

Our founding legislation gives the Council a remit to secure provision strategically across the college and university sectors. It also gives us a unique role to advise the Scottish Government on further and higher education issues.

Our role as a strategic 'agent of change' in the university sector was given renewed emphasis in 2008 by the Scottish Government following the report of the Joint Future Thinking Taskforce on Universities: *New Horizons*. That report was clear that we have a crucial role to play in implementing key strategic initiatives developed in partnership with universities and, where appropriate, colleges.

At the same time, the report proposed that the Council should adopt a new 'lighter touch' approach in our relationship with universities; and it encouraged a more flexible and responsive approach to funding.

Our aim, therefore, is to invest in a broad but coherent range of provision, delivered by colleges and universities with a range of different missions and specialisms with the aim always of ensuring, from a student perspective, barrier-free access to the right provision in the right place at the right time.

Since our establishment, we have brought a new focus to skills and employability – helping to improve employability and students' contribution to the economy and society. In research, initiatives such as the highly regarded 'research pools' in Scotland – in which the Council has worked together with