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# How systematic is Scotland's system of tertiary education?

SKOPE seminar series 05/03/26  
University of Oxford

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**QUALIFICATIONS**

**PROVISION**

**STREAMLINING**

**ONGOING CHALLENGES**

# QUALIFICATIONS





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# SCQF

Qualifications of HEIs but ... other routes available too

SVQ = Scottish Vocational Qualifications

# THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The Framework diagram shows mainstream Scottish qualifications credit rated by SQA and HEIs. However, there are a diverse number of learning programmes on the Framework. To view the full interactive version of the Framework or search the database, please visit the SCQF website at [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)



scottish credit and qualifications framework

SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications		Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Apprenticeships & SVQs
12			Doctoral Degree	Professional Apprenticeship
11			Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, Post Graduate Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship SVQ
10			Honours Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Professional Apprenticeship
9			Bachelors / Ordinary Degree, Graduate Diploma, Graduate Certificate	Graduate Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship SVQ
8		Higher National Diploma	Diploma Of Higher Education	Higher Apprenticeship Technical Apprenticeship SVQ
7	Advanced Higher, Awards, Scottish Baccalaureate	Higher National Certificate	Certificate Of Higher Education	Modern Apprenticeship SVQ
6	Higher, Awards, Skills for Work Higher	National Certificate		Modern Apprenticeship Foundation Apprenticeship SVQ
5	National 5, Awards, Skills for Work National 5			Modern Apprenticeship SVQ
4	National 4, Awards, Skills for Work National 4			SVQ
3	National 3, Awards, Skills for Work National 3			
2	National 2, Awards			
1	National 1, Awards			

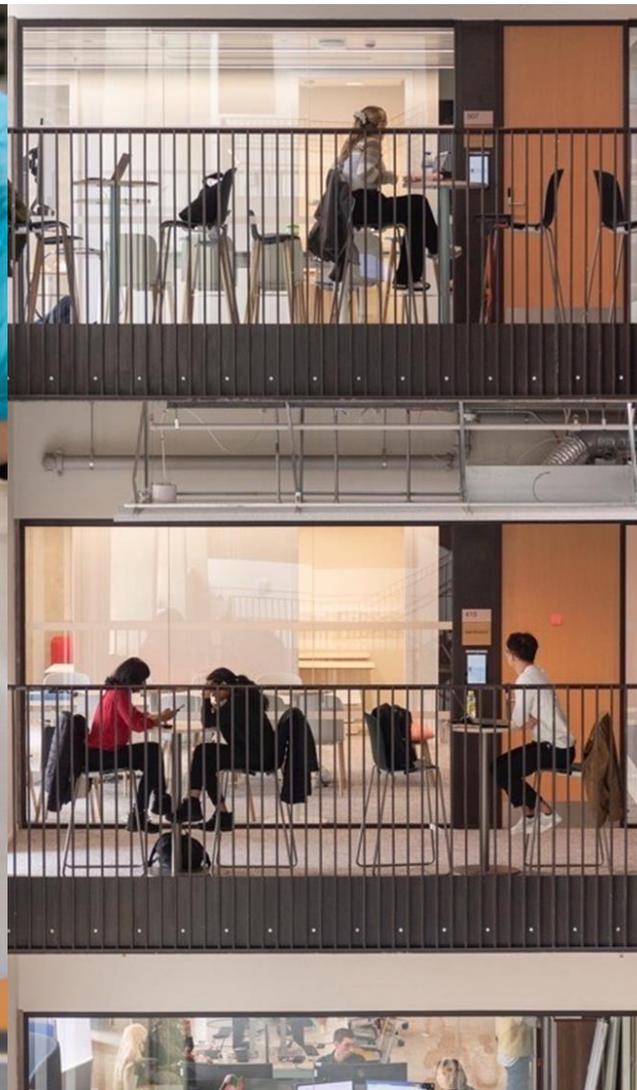
Professional Development Award

National Progression Award



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# PROVISION



## Universities – typical 4 years degrees

**RUSSELL  
GROUP**



### ANCIENT

St Andrews, Aberdeen,  
Glasgow, Edinburgh

### 1960s ROYAL CHARTER

Dundee, Heriot-Watt,  
Stirling, Strathclyde

Further and  
Higher  
Education  
(Scotland)  
Act 1992

### POST-1992

Abertay, Napier,  
Caledonian, Queen  
Margaret, Robert Gordon,  
West of Scotland

### SPECIALIST/OTHER

GSArts, RConservatoireS,  
Open University,  
Scotland's Rural College,  
Highlands and Islands



Universities

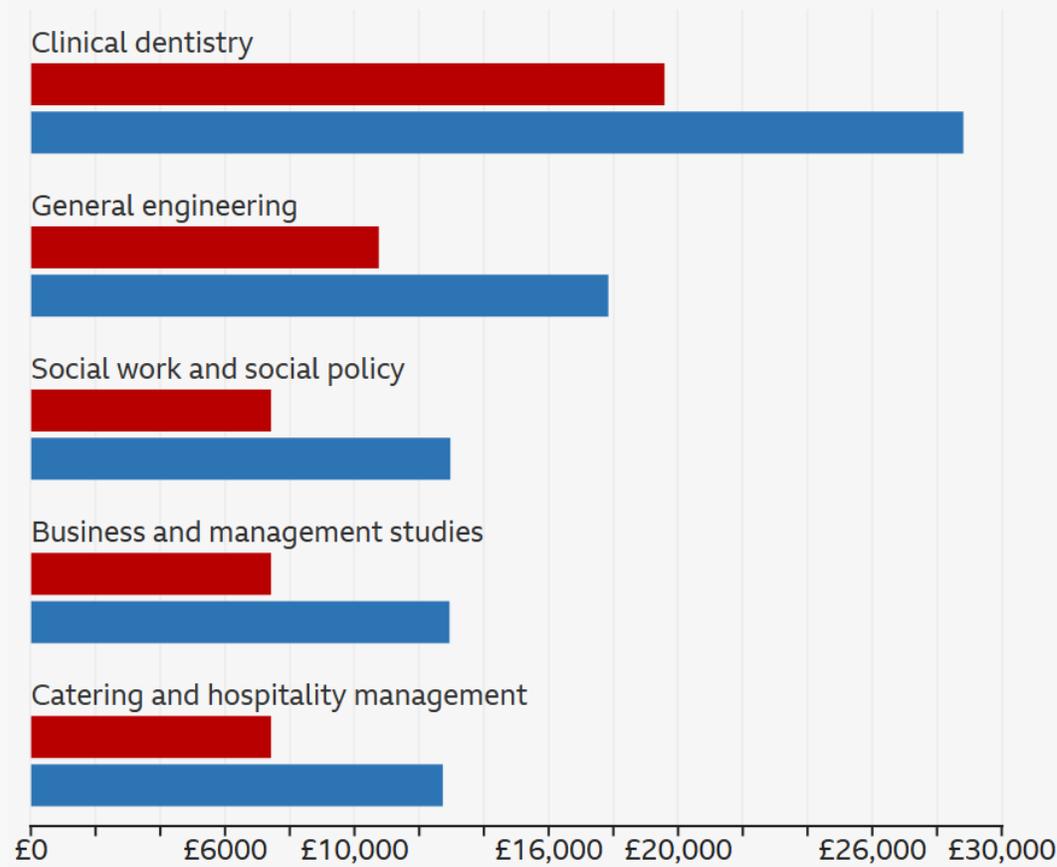


Scottish Funding Council

Promoting further and higher education

## Undergraduate tuition cost shortfalls 2024/25

**Scottish Government contribution** versus **estimated cost per full time student**



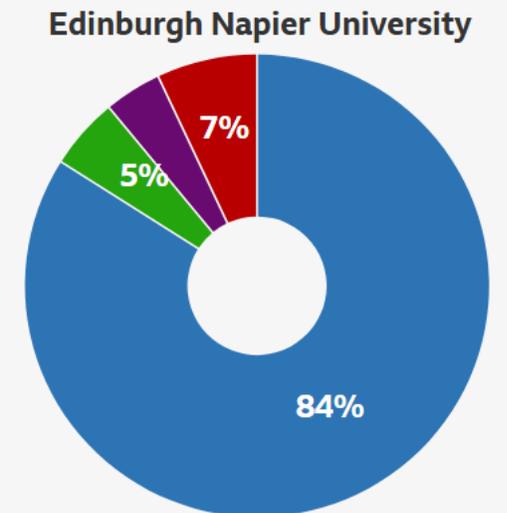
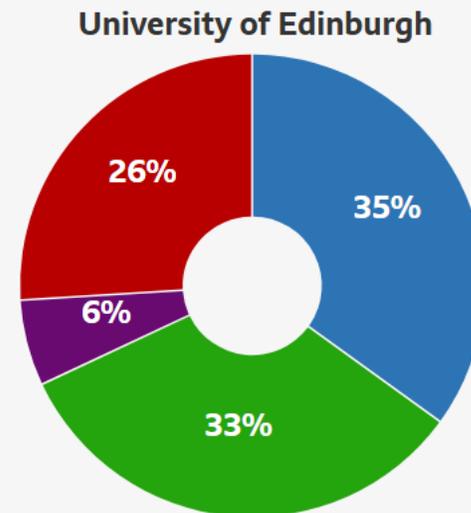
Source: Tertiary Education in Scotland report 2025/David N.F. Bell FRSE



## Where do Scotland's first degree students come from?

Proportion of first degree students by permanent address 2023/24

■ Scotland ■ Rest of UK ■ EU ■ Rest of world



Source: Tertiary Education in Scotland report 2025/David N.F. Bell FRSE, Higher Education Statistics Agency





Universities



7 MAY 2026 – HOLYROOD ELECTIONS

# University to remove Alex Salmond's tuition fees stone

© 20 May 2020



Mr Salmond unveiled the stone in November 2014

# 'We're looking at all parts of the system – except tuition fees'

In election year, Scotland's higher education minister says fees policy non-negotiable, as newly formed review group looks for new models to heal nation's ailing sector

Published on February 10, 2026



# Scottish students could pay towards tuition, says uni principal



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Prof Sir Peter Mathieson says the current funding system is unsustainable for universities

8 January 2026





# Colleges



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## Exhibit 1.

Scotland's colleges as at 1 August 2025

The colleges listed in bold are subject to audit by the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS).



- College – incorporated, audited by AGS
- College – unincorporated, not audited by AGS

Briefing

# Scotland's colleges 2025



Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992  
Incorporated Colleges

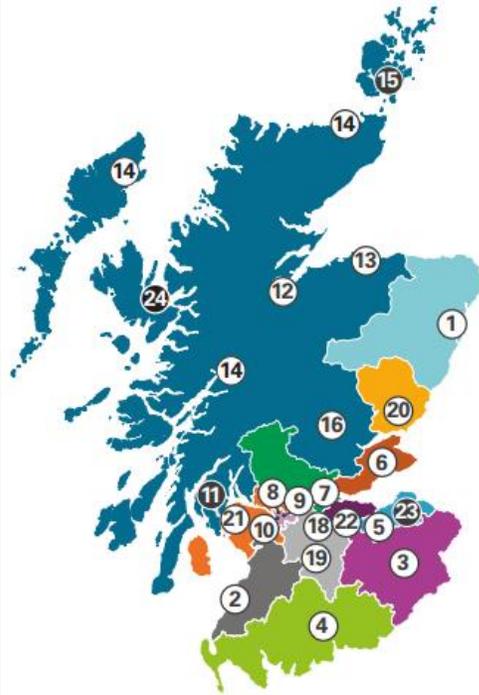
2011 → 41 Colleges

Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013

13 Regions

Mergers

UHI as FE / HE institution with 48 campuses



Region	College
Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire	<b>1 North East Scotland College</b>
Ayrshire	<b>2 Ayrshire College</b>
Borders	<b>3 Borders College</b>
Dumfries and Galloway	<b>4 Dumfries and Galloway College</b>
Edinburgh and Lothians	<b>5 Edinburgh College</b>
Fife	<b>6 Fife College</b>
Central	<b>7 Forth Valley College</b>
Glasgow	<b>8 City of Glasgow College</b>
	<b>9 Glasgow Clyde College</b>
	<b>10 Glasgow Kelvin College</b>
Highlands and Islands	11 UHI Argyll
	<b>12 UHI Inverness</b>
	<b>13 UHI Moray</b>
	<b>14 UHI North, West and Hebrides</b>
	15 UHI Orkney
	<b>16 UHI Perth</b>
	17 UHI Shetland
Lanarkshire	<b>18 New College Lanarkshire</b>
	<b>19 South Lanarkshire College</b>
Tayside	<b>20 Dundee and Angus College</b>
West	<b>21 West College Scotland</b>
West Lothian	<b>22 West Lothian College</b>
n/a	23 Newbattle Abbey College
n/a	24 Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

Note. On 1 August 2023, UHI North Highland, UHI Outer Hebrides (formerly Lews Castle College) and UHI West Highland merged to form UHI North, West and Hebrides. Data prior to this date reflects the legacy institutions.

Source: Audit Scotland



Prepared by Audit Scotland  
October 2025



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# Apprenticeships

Skills Development Scotland

APPRENTICESHIPS.SCOT

From Skills Development Scotland

## Filter results

- All (134)
- Foundation Apprenticeship (15)
- Graduate Apprenticeship (15)
- Modern Apprenticeship (104)

## Modern Apprenticeships

Modern Apprenticeships help employers to develop their workforce by training new staff and upskilling existing employees.

[Read more >](#)

## Foundation Apprenticeships

We developed Foundation Apprenticeships to help young people gain valuable, real-world work experience and access vocational training while they're still at school.

[Read more >](#)

## Graduate Apprenticeships

Graduate Apprenticeships support employers who want to invest in their staff by providing employees with work-based learning up to Master's degree level.

[Read more >](#)

## Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks

Modern Apprenticeships are available across a wide range of sectors and the format of training is decided by the relevant Sector Skills Council. Find a Modern Apprenticeship framework that would work for your business.

[Read more >](#)

## Apprenticeships.scot

The web service that's helping to create the workforce of the future.

[Apprenticeships.scot >](#)

## Work-based Learning

Work-based learning enables people to earn a wage and gain industry-recognised qualifications.

[Read more >](#)



## Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board

The Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) gives employers and industry a leading role in developing apprenticeships in Scotland.

[Read more >](#)

## Apprenticeship Approvals Group

The Apprenticeship Approvals Group (AAG) has responsibility for approving all Scottish apprenticeships from 1 April 2020. It's an employer-led group aimed at ensuring Scottish apprenticeships meet the needs of employers

[Read more >](#)



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# Apprenticeships



## How does a Modern Apprenticeship work?

As a Modern Apprentice, you'll:

- ✔ work, earn and learn – you'll be employed by a company
- ✔ get a qualification that's recognised by industry employers
- ✔ have a job and learn for between 1 and 4 years
- ✔ choose from over 100 different Modern Apprenticeships

## Benefits

A Modern Apprenticeship is a brilliant way to learn while you earn. It'll help you:

- ✔ get valuable workplace skills
- ✔ work with a wide range of people
- ✔ understand your interests and talents
- ✔ increase your confidence, resilience and social skills
- ✔ earn a wage while you learn
- ✔ enhance your career opportunities



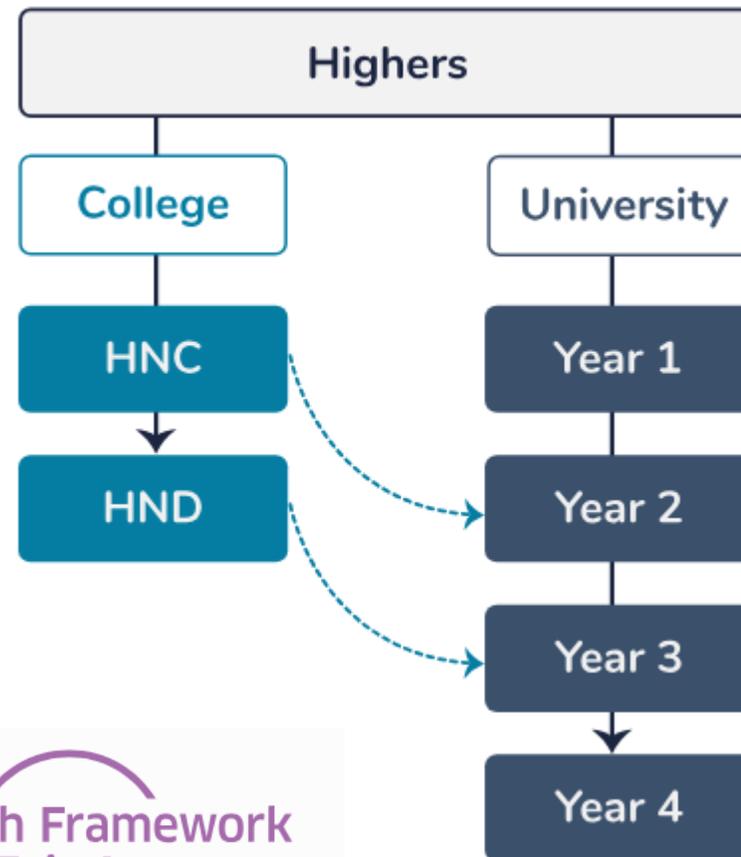
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# STREAMLINING



# Example: 'articulation'

- Transition from College to University
- Commissioner for Fair Access  
Professor John McKendrick
- Articulation mainly College → post-1992
- Commissioner asks for more detailed data



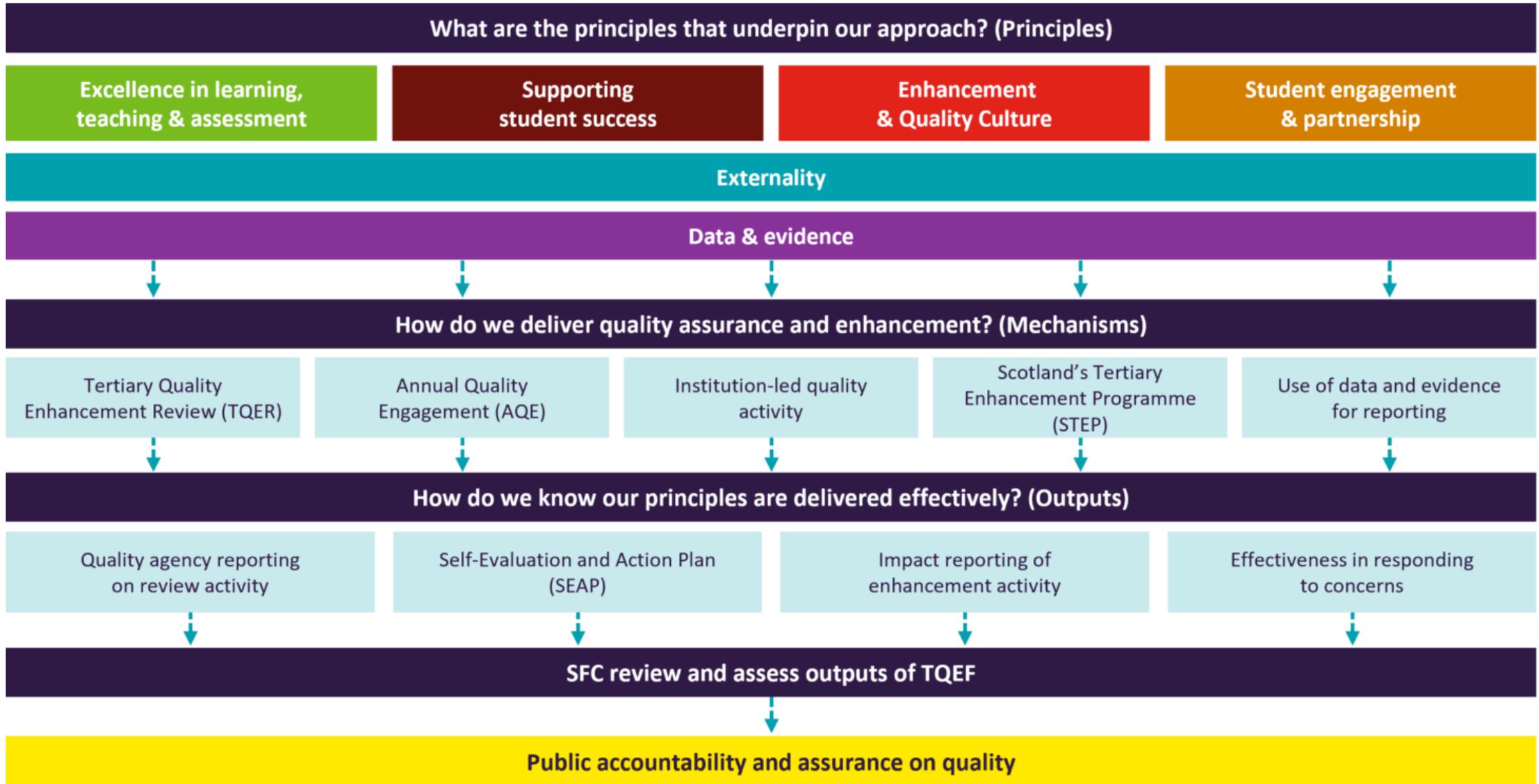
# TQEF Scotland's Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework

- Support more effective collaboration across colleges and universities, removing barriers to the sharing of innovation and learning, thereby promoting tertiary collaborations, where institutions wish to do so.
- Foster a shared learning community leading to a common language and culture around learning and teaching across the tertiary system.
- Implemented from academic year 2024-2025 onwards





The TQER is the external peer-led and enhancement focused review method for Scotland's tertiary sector and is a single method for colleges and universities. SFC has commissioned QAA to manage and deliver the TQER with support from CDN and sparqs to raise awareness, deliver training and development.



# Withers Report 2023

**Fit for the Future: developing  
a post-school learning  
system to fuel economic  
transformation**

**Skills Delivery Landscape  
Review – Final Report**

Submitted to Scottish Ministers, May 2023

## **15 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Stronger leadership, coherent narrative

Sector oversight, national and regional  
planning

Establish single national funding body

Process of funding allocations

New qualifications body

Comprehensive audit of pathways and  
qualifications

Digital training record

Skills Development Scotland Reform

Employers Board and Forum

Enterprise agencies, business investment

Clarity on entry points for users

# New qualifications body

REBRAND OR RESET?

We're working on a new website. You'll see references to both Qualifications Scotland and SQA while we complete this work. [Learn more.](#)

## Becoming Qualifications Scotland - what it means for you

As part of the [Scottish Government's education reform programme](#)  the Education (Scotland) Act 2025 established Qualifications Scotland as the replacement for the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

Qualifications Scotland began on 1 February 2026, starting a new era for the delivery of qualifications and assessments.

# Funding and Governance

## Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill

As introduced, this Bill changes the way that funding is provided for post-school education and skills training.

**This is a Government bill**

The Bill was introduced on 5 February 2025. Stage 3 ended on 20 January 2026.



Scottish Funding Council

Promoting further and higher education

Skills  
Development  
Scotland



The Bill has been passed. Royal Assent is required for it to become an Act.

-  Explore the guidance and rules for Bills
-  See the process for Bills and how to share your views

# Funding and Governance

## National Funding Strategy

The Scottish ministers must prepare a national funding strategy for tertiary education, skills and apprenticeships. Needs to set out:

- skills needs
- priorities
- outcomes

Focus on coherent provision – duty of Council

- (a) further and higher education by post-16 education bodies
- (b) Scottish apprenticeships and work-based learning

Review of credit-based funding model → College courses

Engagement with trade unions, students and external partners

# Funding and Governance

## National Funding Strategy



Scottish Funding Council  
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Remains partner in  
apprenticeships and  
work-based learning

Careers service

Skills forecasting

Bill passed by 75 votes to 46  
FOR – SNP Greens  
AGAINST – Conservative Labour



## The development of a Future Framework for Scotland's universities is underway

Scotland's Future Framework will set out the options for the next 20 years of higher education. Co-convenor Andrea Nolan presents the work taking place

COMMENT | 4/03/26

### PHASE 1

Evidence base /  
future role



### PHASE 2

Efficiency and  
transformation



### PHASE 3

Development of  
Policy solutions



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# ONGOING CHALLENGES



# Where Next for Scottish Universities and Colleges?

Des McNulty and Huw Morris  
January 2026

## Where Next?

### TIME FOR A RETHINK

1. Funding system is unsustainable
2. 'No tuition fees' stance forces intake of foreign students
3. Home students experience difficulties to enter Ancient universities
4. Four years degrees are expensive
5. College sector in crisis with 92% of them in deficit
6. Colleges run the risk to be penalised when reacting to employment needs

Need for further streamlining through institutional cooperation and regional collaborations, shared services, mergers?

Future Framework for Universities work is also needed for Colleges





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**Thank you!**  
**Questions?**