ITEM 17
FOR NOTING

GLASGOW KELVIN COLLEGE

Learning and Teaching Committee – 4 May 2022

Wider Harms Report

Report by Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality Enhancement

1. Introduction

In April 2022, the Scottish Government published the attached report on the wider harms of the covid-19 pandemic on learners, students and staff within Higher Education, Further Education and Community Learning and Development in Scotland.

2. Body of the report and impact on the College

The attached report considers the impact of Covid-19 on student learning, mental health and wellbeing, staff and CLD volunteers, alongside wider social and financial effects. The final section of the report highlights ongoing adaptations. The report brings together views from University, college and CLD representatives along with relevant survey data.

3. Resource Implications

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

4. Equalities

There are no equality implications arising directly from this report.

5. Risk and Assurance

The attached report highlights the risks of significant harms and ongoing disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. Data Protection

There are no data protection implications arising directly from this report.

7. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

i. note the contents of the report.

8. Further Information

Members can obtain additional information on the contents of this report from Robin Ashton, Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality Enhancement.

Glasgow Kelvin College
SS/RA
22/04/2022

Appendix

Wider Harms of the Covid-19 pandemic on Learners, Students and Staff within Higher Education, Further Education and Community Learning and Development in Scotland

April 2022

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Wider Harms of the Covid-19 pandemic on Learners, Students and Staff within Higher Education, Further Education and Community Learning and Development in Scotland - 14.03.2022

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected Further Education (FE), Higher Education (HE) and the Community Learning and Development (CLD) sector for the past three academic years. During academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21 there were significant public health measures in place that affected students for long periods of time. For the 2021-22 session, although the student experience has been closer to what it was pre-Covid, there has still been an ongoing cumulative wider impact on students and learners, where institutions have been implementing voluntary additional measures going beyond the requirements of the statutory guidance. To date, there has been much focus on the direct health harms of the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper considers the indirect, wider harms of the pandemic on students, learners and staff within the FE, HE and CLD sectors from the perspective of stakeholders and drawing on the findings or relevant reports relating to these sectors. Some of these wider harms will not be unique to these sectors and are also likely to have affected other groups.

The COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Universities and Colleges (EAG) provides detailed consideration on how public health and related scientific advice can be applied to operational implementation. It provides advice to Scottish Government and the Advanced Learning Recovery Group to support decision and policy making for the FE, HE and CLD sectors during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The EAG met with student, college, university, CLD and union representatives during the autumn of 2022, prior to the emergence of the Omicron variant. This report summarises the findings of these discussions, focusing on the following themes:

- Disruption to student learning
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Social effects
- Financial effects
- Impacts on staff and CLD volunteers
- Ongoing adaptations

This report is intended to be used to support future discussions by the EAG on mitigations of the wider harms' impacts of Covid-19 on FE, HE and CLD.

2. Disruption to student learning

There is now considerable evidence (1) from around the world (2) that there have been disruptions to student learning in further and higher education. This has also been the case in Scotland.

During the past three academic years, in-person teaching and learning has been subject to a range of protective measures, some of which have led to significant changes to the format and experience of learning, both negatively and cumulatively affecting the quality of the learning experiences of Scotland's students and learners. The vast majority of students' educational experience has been adversely affected by reduced levels of in-person teaching and learning. However, the most significant deficits are likely to have been experienced by the most socially disadvantaged and vulnerable students and learners, and by those who have studied vocational courses or courses with significant practical elements where there has been a lack of access to work placements. This has resulted in some educational experiences not fully covering the required breadth of knowledge and experience in order for students to develop the necessary skills required for the workplace.

Student, college and university representatives all reported that because of the pandemic's cumulative impact on learning, restoring more face-to-face provision on campus is becoming increasingly important to ensure that course progression is maintained. Many students are demanding more in-person teaching: one poll of over 400 Strathclyde University students (3) showed that 75% of the students surveyed wanted more in-person teaching. The *NUS Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3, November 2020* (4), sampled the views of over 4,000 students in Scotland and highlighted the deficit in practical skills (e.g. wet labs) and a need to take steps to avoid longer term employability issues for affected students as it might lead to future challenges in the workplace including students not having the required level of skills and experience when looking for a job.

College and student representatives reported that some non-practical courses were delivered online with little or no in-person teaching as a consequence of practical subjects being prioritised. Given that Scottish Government guidance during a large proportion of the pandemic was to work from home where possible, many courses that didn't require students to physically present in a lab, workshop or similar were almost delivered fully online for extended periods of time. This has led to those students being disadvantaged as they have been deprived of learning experiences where face-to-face interactions would have been more beneficial, such as tutorials and group-work.

Specific examples of challenges provided by student and college representatives around in-person teaching included one college delaying the start of the academic term for most students in order to enable deferred students on practical courses to

complete their final year. Another example is dentistry students being required to complete an extra year of study, repeating the 2020-21 academic year. Students from vulnerable groups, including those with additional support needs, face significant challenges in their educational experiences and in many cases have been unable to access a consistent level of support. For example, many English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students remained in their own communities due to lockdowns and have not progressed their language skills.

College and student representatives explained that the number of students dropping out of courses has increased. Further increases in drop-out rates remains a serious risk and new entrants who started in January 2022 are another at risk cohort. College representatives indicated that overall numbers of college student enrolments are considerably down in the current academic year and attributed this to issues including pupils staying on at school, more students going to university as a result of increased attainment since 2019 (5), the greater availability of low skilled jobs and college course numbers being capped due to restrictions such as physical distancing requirements. The February 2022 *Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations* evidences that the proportion of school leavers in Higher Education (at either Universities or Colleges) increased from 44.2% for 2019/20 to 45.1% for 2020/21 while the proportion of school leavers who were in Further Education fell from 28.1% to 23.3% and the proportion of school leavers that were unemployed decreased from 6.0% for 2019/20 to 4.2% for 2020/21 (6). In addition, the statistics show an increase in the proportion of school leavers coming from S6 (62.8% in 2019/20 to 63.2% in 2020/21), suggesting that more S4 and S5 pupils are staying on to later years of school provision.

While concerns about reduced levels of in-person teaching have had a significant negative impact on learning experiences, it is also important to recognise that online learning had a number of benefits. Student representatives stated that the pandemic had demonstrated that many elements of university courses can be delivered online. University and college representatives reported that the blended learning environment has been helpful, accelerating innovation and providing flexibility for some students who found it better suited their circumstances. Other positives included being able to listen to lectures at different times, and that the chat function may be less intimidating for some students and they can also pre-record contributions. The Office for National Statistics survey *Coronavirus and higher education students: England, 19 to 29 November 2021* (7) reported that of the surveyed students who were enrolled in an educational institution during the 2020/21 academic year, 43% indicated that their academic performance has been better since the start of the Autumn 2021 term compared with the previous academic year. University representatives indicated that lecturers have been very creative in adapting to prepare, deliver and assess more online courses. Staff commitment, engagement and effort has enabled online learning to happen. Student engagement with online materials has been positive in many cases. However, it was acknowledged that other students have been disengaging with online learning for

reasons including challenges with digital access as well as the absence of in-person interaction.

There is a specific need for support to improve captioning. Since 23 September 2020, all ‘time-based media’ (video and audio) have been required to either provide an accurate transcript or captioning, or both (video only). This created a substantial workload issue as digital content significantly increased during the pandemic. University representatives stated that pre-recorded and other asynchronous university materials have been particularly useful for international students who were unable to travel for some of the time during the 2020-21 academic year and during the early stages of the current academic year. This resulted in some students studying in different time zones. Looking ahead, these resources should ideally continue to be available to support student transitions.

College and student representatives described how digital connectivity is inconsistent across Scotland and this has been a particular issue for many students from remote rural areas who have been further isolated. Some college students are using Smartphones to study online. One in ten respondents to the Thriving Learners survey of university students (8), felt that they did not have adequate internet access where they lived to effectively engage with university and friends online. Student representatives also reported that access to other learning resources was affected during the pandemic, particularly for remote institutions with students unable to access books in libraries. This has improved but remains a concern.

Although online learning will continue, particularly for large-scale lectures, universities are likely to move towards more face-to-face provision and there are demands for this from both students and staff. During Semester 2 of the current academic year, small group teaching is being prioritised and is most valued by students. Some universities are planning larger group activities (including some on-campus assessments), with many retaining caps on maximum numbers.

University representatives commented that many student-facing services have been delivered online. This, at least to some extent, will continue to be the case in the future as this experience has been positive for many students and they have benefited from a more flexible support service with a greater reach. University representatives also reported that assessment policies have been changed as a result of the pandemic and evidence is emerging of a closing of the race and disability awarding gaps, although further evidence is needed to understand this.

College representatives indicated that in courses that include mandatory placement elements, many students have been unable to undertake those placements, and whilst awarding bodies may have altered assessment models to enable qualification awards, this does not necessarily equip students with the required skills for the workplace. Colleges must therefore evaluate the loss of learning for students over

the past three academic years and plan for how this can be addressed, whilst at the same time catering for new students commencing their courses of study, who themselves will have previously experienced lost learning, often from a school setting. They added that school – college partnership links have also been negatively affected during the pandemic, reducing the learning opportunities provided for the cohort of pupils who would have otherwise benefited from these links.

Community Learning and Development (CLD) Learner Impacts

There were specific issues raised by CLD representatives on the disruption to learning due to a lack of available facilities for in-person teaching and training. This was because many providers often let their facilities and rely on the facility owners who, when the situation dictates, are likely to prioritise their own requirements for access at the expense of CLD provision. A survey by Youthlink Scotland (9) in October 2021 found that 54% of respondents had access to facilities that they need, compared to 22% in June. Although this was an improvement on previous survey figures during the pandemic, the provider noted that there remain significant challenges in obtaining access to schools, community lets, leisure centres, faith based centres, other community venues and also outdoor spaces. Hiring facilities costs are becoming increasingly expensive along with many other costs.

CLD representatives cited digital access as a significant challenge and reported that the digital divide is still very real and exacerbating inequalities. Although access to technology is a major issue, not having the skills and understanding to use technology is also a barrier. This is particularly true for many adult learners and they will continue to miss out on learning experiences until this is addressed.

CLD representatives indicated that learning loss is a major challenge for many learners where progression, course completions and destination outcomes have been negatively impacted. For the most vulnerable learners, in some cases, learning regression has taken place during the pandemic necessitating a re-establishing of learner basic ground rules for attendance and behaviours including time-keeping, respectful relationships etc. It is crucial that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that learners who have lost motivation and enthusiasm for learning receive the appropriate support. This includes providing key messages to learners through effective CLD communications and marketing.

Due to the varied nature the of work within CLD together with the range of different settings that staff and volunteers are required to operate in, when trying to apply appropriate Covid-19 guidance, some find it confusing. It would be helpful if good practice could be more effectively shared amongst staff and volunteers across CLD in order to promote a more consistent approach towards supporting adherence within the sector.

3. Mental Health and Wellbeing

This section explores how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the mental health and wellbeing of FE/HE students and CLD learners. This paper uses The World Health Organisation's definition that 'mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community' (10).

Understanding the determinants of worsening mental health is required. College representatives explained that prior to the pandemic, there was already concern about the deterioration in mental health and wellbeing amongst the student population, particularly in those from more disadvantaged backgrounds and vulnerable groups, exacerbated by a lower baseline in terms of mental health support being offered compared with other education sectors. Over the course of the pandemic, mental health and wellbeing amongst students and learners has further deteriorated. The lack of socialising and human interaction/connection as well as academic stresses and in many cases financial hardship have all affected this. Think Positive research, 2020, (11), involving over 3000 students in Scotland, identified that 48.9% of students believed lack of money and financial pressures had a negative impact on their mental health. The *NUS Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3,* (4) stated that over half of the students surveyed indicated that their mental health was worse than it was pre-Covid-19 and cited a number of challenging wellbeing issues including isolation, loneliness, anxiety, inability to make new friends and depression. These concerns exist nationally. The Office for National Statistics survey *Coronavirus and higher education students: England, 19 to 29 November 2021*, (7) reported that of the students at English Universities surveyed, the proportion of students feeling lonely often or always was 14%, significantly higher than the adult population in Great Britain (6%), but not significantly different to the 16- to 29-year-old age group (10%) and the average life satisfaction score for students was 6.7, which was significantly lower than the adult population in Great Britain (7.1), but was not any different to the 16- to 29-year-old age group (6.7). Another Office of National Statistics survey *Covid-19 Schools Infection Survey, England: mental health and Long Covid, November to December 2021,* (12) provides further evidence of how within education, the pandemic has particularly affected socially disadvantaged young people of secondary school age and reports that a much greater proportion of secondary school pupils eligible for free school meals had a probable mental health disorder compared with those who were not eligible (28.3% compared with 12.4%).

There has been a cumulative impact on student mental health during this third academic year of disruption affecting many students and learners' capacity to progress. Research recently published by the Mental Health Foundation, of over 15,000 students in Scotland (8) found that 74% reported low wellbeing and more students were dissatisfied with their learning than satisfied; nearly 20% of students

reported suicidal ideation in the six months prior to the survey. Higher Education Student Data (HESA) (13) shows that in 2016-17, there were 1,920 entrants at Scottish Providers that declared a mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder, increasing to 3,050 declarations in 2018-19, 3,585 in 2019-20 and 4,495 in 2020-21. In rural student halls, it is reported that deterioration in mental health has contributed to an increase in substance misuse. Particular consideration should be given to student parents at college who require attention as they lack a division between home, work and study. The same goes for college students who are not undertaking practical courses and have had over a year of online study.

Student, college, university and CLD representatives expressed concerns about the level of mental health support available. *The Royal College of Psychiatrists Mental Health of Higher Education Students report, May 2021*, (14) highlights the clear links between student mental health and wellbeing and academic performance. The report includes recommendations to deliver improved and further integrated mental health and wellbeing services for students through increased collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and the NHS. Support for mental health and wellbeing is available via a range of providers and an Open Letter (15) from the Principals and Student Union Presidents of Scotland's 19 universities assured students that mental health and wellbeing was a top priority in the 21/22 academic year with institutions seeking to establish whole institution approaches to support wider wellbeing. The *NUS Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3, November 2020* (4) found that around three in five students who sought mental health support, were satisfied with what they received. 23% of students had sought mental health support since the start of the pandemic and 33% were missing face-to-face pastoral support. The additional resource provided during the pandemic to support mental health and wellbeing by Scottish Government was welcomed. However, as it is only a short term measure, it is unclear how in the longer term institutions will be able to fully support those with mental health needs, and to offer equity of access across the education system. With an increasing number of students disclosing mental health issues and disabilities, resources are likely to be further stretched. University representatives described how out-of-hours mental health support could be highly beneficial for those students in need, but few institutions can offer this service. One option might be for organisations to share out-of-hours access to address this need. Where institutions are offering it, there has been a reported significant emotional toll on a typically small staff team that routinely deal with crisis cases.

CLD representatives reported that the reduction in face-to-face activity over the course of the pandemic has had a significant impact on learners' mental health with many experiencing feelings of isolation, anxiety and reduced self-esteem, thus exacerbating already poor mental health outcomes especially in the most vulnerable. The inability and lack of opportunity to build relationships and socialise in a safe space could further create a divide between learners and their community. The

Headlines from the Access to Facilities Survey October 2021 (9) by Youth Link Scotland explains that because of significantly reduced in-person learning due to a lack of available facilities for CLD provision, many young people are unable to access important relationships and much-needed support with health and wellbeing.

4. Social effects

The social effects of Covid-19 have been far reaching. Perspectives regarding the impact on Scotland's student population is reflected within this section, drawing on evidence provided and comments from stakeholders.

The *NUS Coronavirus Student Survey Phase 3* (4) indicated that 75% of surveyed students in Scotland were missing social interactions with their peers and also staff. University and student representatives stated that due to isolation the lack of on-campus activity for many students, relationships are under-developed and students don't know each other or their lecturers like previous cohorts did. Student representatives indicated that the challenges of social reintegration of students on campus for in-person learning and socialising is making it harder for students to adapt to student life. This could be damaging the social development of many younger adults and 1st and 2nd year students are becoming noticeably less vocal on issues of student life. There have been reports of an increase in discrimination and intolerance towards students with disabilities, particularly 'invisible' disabilities, leading to many feeling compelled to disclose their disability to manage face covering exemption situations. There have been reports about increased levels of general rudeness amongst students and staff as well as the reduced tolerance levels of students towards people's views.

College representatives reported that colleges enrol disproportionally high numbers of students from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds. SFC College data (16) shows that 32.2% of credits delivered on FE courses at colleges in 2020-21 were provided to learners from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland. The impact of the associated Covid-19 harms on this cohort has widened inequalities. Many younger students, as well as those with additional support needs, have not had the chance to socialise and develop essential everyday life skills. This has resulted in the emergence of some behavioural issues in students and learners that have not generally been observed in previous year-groups. Student and college representatives made the point that developing skills for learning, life and work is a key component of students' education, particularly for those who are currently furthest away from the workforce, but the impact of the pandemic has in many cases, severely limited this skills development.

University representatives also noted an increase in social skills deficits being reported, especially in younger students (e.g. those aged 14-16 when the pandemic

started), both in social settings and in learning, as students have not socialised like they normally would have pre-Covid-19. Student representatives reported that there have been limited opportunities to question lecturers or peers through online learning, affecting student mental health. Many younger students demonstrate a lack of safety behaviours and resilience. This is affecting student life, learning and the ability of students to be resourceful. An example of how institutions are supporting students is the University of Glasgow's the SafeZone App to address general safety concerns for students. Students can use this app to alert the University's security services of an emergency, of a need for first aid, or to access help such as obtaining directions.

College and university representatives reported that equity of rules to deal with Covid-19 across all areas of society would be helpful. Students find it confusing how they can visit what they might consider high risk settings such as pubs and night clubs, and yet experience tight restrictions within perceived low risk settings within education. On a similar theme, a 16-year-old school pupil who may also be attending college, has different sets of rules to a 16-year-old who has already left school and is attending college. Strong messaging and effective communications is therefore required to overcome the potential for confusion. These discrepancies may also be problematic when trying to encourage Covid-19 compliance on campus. Student representatives indicated that college and university students are confused and in many cases anxious about the Covid-19 rules. Consistent, concise and well-timed communications to students is required in order for messaging to be effective.

Student representatives indicated that there are some international students who have not received a recognised vaccine and struggle to be eligible for the Covid Status app (to access mass events and night clubs, for example) resulting in confusion among students about what they are able to participate in, thus affecting their opportunities for socialising.

5. Financial effects

Covid-19 has produced a major shock to economies around the world and Scotland's economy has been affected. There are significant financial implications for institutions and us all as individuals. This section describes the financial effects within the university, college and CLD sectors.

Student representatives indicated that many students across Scotland lack sufficient funds to continue with their courses of study, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. The November 2021 'Thriving Learners' report, (8), found that 21.5% of students surveyed worried about running out of food, nearly a quarter ate less due to a lack of resources or money and 7.2% were in households that ran out of food. Overall, food poverty among students, particularly older

students, is a rising concern. NUS Scotland's research from July 2021 (17) found that 12% of Scotland's students are using foodbanks, 27% rely on credit cards, and 9% use bank loans. 72% of students expressed concern about their ability to manage financially. Student representatives explained that the number of cases of student homelessness has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Super Priority Visas and increased costs have harmed students financially, especially international students. Many students are working more hours in employment than are recommended.

University representatives indicated that there has been an increase in the number of staff and students disclosing disabilities and learning needs, resulting in increased support costs. HESA data (13) shows in 2020-21 that 42,135 university students in Scotland had a known disability (15% of all students). This is an increase from 2019-20 when 14% of all students had a known disability. SAAS data for 2020-2021, (18), shows 5,290 full-time students received Disabled Students' Allowance totalling £10.7 million. An increase from 2019-2020 (5,175 students and £9.8 million). Emergency student funding provided last year was welcomed and made a difference to student retention and engagement. However, only a minority of students had received support from their institutions through discretionary funds.

College representatives reported that the delivery of online learning during the pandemic has brought a focus on digital poverty. Along with financial support from the government, institutions have provided the hardware and data that students need for online learning. However, many students, particularly those from the most disadvantaged groups, simply do not have a safe, nor even adequate place to complete their online learning, and associated costs such as Wi-Fi can be prohibitive. Student representatives indicated that some students are no longer attending online lectures because of Wi-Fi, Pay-As-You-Go data and equipment costs. There are also financial implications for institutions in ensuring digital access for all within future cohorts. There are cost implications associated with IT support including improving captioning and other technologies that should be considered in the context of Scotland's Digital Strategy where new ways of working are to be designed to meet the needs of the user.

College representatives shared the concern that some individuals will have lost the opportunity to learn new skills at a key point in their lives. This will affect their future career progression and ability to earn. More widely, it will have an impact on the pipeline of skills required by Scotland's economy. It is important to consider how, at some point in the future, those who have missed out on educational opportunities due to the pandemic can be re-engaged with education later on in life.

CLD representatives reported that many learners have been financially adversely affected by the pandemic. Common issues affecting learners as well as those who

financially support them include furlough, unemployment, lack of part-time work availability, unpaid course completion grants, and inability to access childcare.

6. Impact on Staff and CLD Volunteers

Throughout the course of the pandemic, university and college staff and CLD staff and volunteers have encountered challenging and unfamiliar situations. This section describes those challenges and the associated impacts.

Union representatives reported that the workload of staff and the way in which people work has become considerably more demanding during the pandemic. There are additional concerns in relation to women, race, carers and disabled staff as some of them have left employment during the pandemic due to these extra work pressures. In the HE sector, there are concerns that due to increased workloads in teaching provision, research time is reduced. 50% of 1,000 Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) members (mainly from the FE sector) who were surveyed in November 2021 (19), worked overtime due to their institution's approach to online learning. Unions identified understaffing as a fundamental issue.

Union and college representatives reported that pre-pandemic, there were already morale issues in HE due to high workloads, pension cuts, job insecurity and other factors, leading to poor mental health and wellbeing outcomes among staff. Along with a perceived lack of recognition felt by some, these issues have been exacerbated during the pandemic with the additional Covid-19 safety fears of many staff and particularly frontline workers (cleaners, estate staff, accommodation staff). With the return to campuses of increasing numbers of staff, students and learners' unions have particular safety concerns for clinically vulnerable staff, especially those who cannot work from home. Many lower paid workers perceive that little or no consideration is given to their health, or changes to their working practices. 36% of the EIS survey respondents (19) said their institution had checked on their personal wellbeing during the pandemic. UCU also conducted a survey of their members in Scotland in August 2021 (20) and 68% felt their employer was either somewhat supportive or very supportive of staff and the challenges faced over the past academic year.

Workforce resilience is an emerging issue. Union surveys (19) state that 70% of EIS respondents felt that the changed working practices introduced during the pandemic raised their stress levels and 75% of UCU Scotland surveyed members experienced an increase in stress or anxiety. Staff are becoming less confident about their existing skills due to a combination of changes to educational delivery particularly around digital skills and a lack of opportunity for staff to put new skills into practice. College, CLD and union representatives reported that the move to online teaching has been a learning curve for many staff, where they require equipment as well as

on-going training in a very uncertain and changing work environment. Union representatives reported that the provision of suitable equipment for staff varies significantly across institutions. 73% of 1,000 EIS members surveyed, (19), supported hybrid working in a post-Covid environment and that it has benefited some staff including those with disabilities. Hybrid working, for some, has led to a decrease in the distinction between home-life and work-life and some people are working flexible but longer hours. There are concerns that freedoms gained through flexible working may be lost once staff return to the workplace and also concerns about increasing face-to-face activity in universities and colleges. 41% of 994 UCU Scotland members surveyed were anxious about returning to in-person on-campus working. Some members found online working supportive and productive due to stricter time limits on meetings, fewer interruptions at home etc. Some staff find preparing for online teaching to be more resource intensive.

Union representatives stated that staff-student relations have been challenging during the pandemic. There have been reports of incidents in libraries in particular, where support staff have been placed in stressful situations such as having to ask students to comply with face coverings and not congregate in groups. Staff-staff relations are also a concern, particularly when considering career progression for members working from home who are more isolated. Support staff members and local management should be working closely together building strong relationships in order to ensure that adherence to protective measures remains high and to maintain a COVID-safe environment.

CLD representatives reported that many staff have been financially adversely affected by the pandemic. Union representatives indicated that employers should be offering job security to staff during the pandemic and zero hours' contracts are a concern for many staff and the impact of inflation on stagnant salary levels is an issue. They also stated that staff should have had access to a fund similar to the student support fund that was provided during the pandemic. Staff are also worried whether the environment they are working in is COVID-safe as the interpreting of Scottish Government Covid-19 guidance within CLD settings can be challenging.

Union representatives reported that some support staff, such as cleaners and security staff, are often offering support to students in precarious situations where specialist support may be more appropriate e.g. supporting students with very poor mental health. The support available to staff in the HE/FE sector varies and is often more extensive in larger or better resourced institutions. Management should ensure they regularly check-in with staff, especially those who are working from home as there is a risk that staff feel more isolated and receive less support, particularly women, who are more likely to be impacted. The same variability of provision also applies to staff seeking access to occupational health support and needs to be addressed. There are concerns about the wellbeing of people who continue to work from home while being unfit for work due to illness.

7. Ongoing Adaptation

The pandemic has been with us for over two years and attention is turning to managing the virus on a longer term basis while keeping the level of infections as low as possible. Adaptation approaches should alleviate the impact of the virus, but it is important for the HE/FE/CLD sectors to consider the wider harms outlined above and consider how addressing these, with support from other organisations, can help with recovery.

University, college and CLD responses to the challenges posed by the pandemic, have led to some positive impacts on educational delivery as the sector has quickly adapted to a changing environment. These positive developments should be noted by the sector and used to inform future planning and delivery.
During the pandemic, university representatives indicated that institutions have collaborated well with professional bodies, other institutions and students in decision-making to minimise Covid-19 impacts on students and maximise safety. This has led to a general improvement in communication with students as well as improved planning and sharing of experiences within the sector, within subject areas, and with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). Union representatives have also identified that there is an opportunity to collaborate to further develop sector wide policies on mental health, for example. It is important to retain this level of collaboration in order to maintain high levels of adherence to Covid-safe measures in order to avoid further protective measures needing to be introduced that could have the potential to have a significant negative impact on the wider harms.

University representatives reported that some positive effects and learning from the Covid-19 pandemic are summarised in the *Scottish sector learning from the Covid-19 pandemic* report (21). e.g. working with students to improve communication and involving them in planning and decision-making. This has helped inform decision making on responding to challenging issues faced by students. Examples of this include the no-detriment policies (22) in summer 2020, and the ongoing assessment support measures during the 2020-21 academic year, for which many universities had to substantially rewrite their assessment regulations in light of the requirements of Professional Bodies. It is important for institutions to share best practice and the developments of new policies via QAA's Enhancement Theme and institution led projects including building student communities online, addressing digital poverty and using technology in learning, student transition points, resilience and developing student peer-to-peer initiatives.

College and university representatives reported that upgraded technology, and staff and student online skills development was accelerated by the pandemic. These advances offer an opportunity to capitalise on this rapid development of online learning provision, in order to shape and improve future educational delivery.

Suitable development training sessions and online resources have been created within institutions and shared across the sector. So to have pedagogical principles and frameworks for good educational practice online. Union representatives have added that provision of digital training and digital support for staff needs to be consistent across institutions and further support with captioning would be welcome. Union representatives also made the point that training for managers to support cultural change as a result of these adaptations was also welcome. They reported that during the pandemic, there has been reduced demands on the sector from some organisations, such as the Scottish Funding Council, which is a positive development.

College and University representatives agree that good practice and innovations in online and blended learning should be retained and included in future curriculum planning informing future practice in teaching, learning and assessment. This could include digital alternatives to practical training and assessment to enhance the educational offer to students. In some cases, innovations had evolved from students teaching staff about technology.

CLD representatives reported that there have been positive effects in terms of the provision of online activities, as some learners participate in these who may not have engaged face-to-face. Learners with disabilities as well as those undertaking ESOL courses are among those who have benefitted.

Given the importance of social interactions, student representatives indicated that facilitating safe, socially distanced, in-person student gatherings through the procurement of larger venues may be beneficial as part of future planning.

There has been high vaccine uptake among the student population as well as staff, and institutions have supported and encouraged this. The latest Public Health Scotland data shows that 83% of individuals aged 17-21yrs have had their first vaccine, 73% have had their second vaccine and 64% of eligible 17-21 year olds have had their booster vaccine. Antibody rates for 16-25 year olds in Scotland are estimated to be 91% (23). Student representatives reported that having vaccine buses or clinics on campus could be beneficial to increase vaccine and booster uptake further. This and other protective measures such as testing, where high levels of adherence are maintained, will be key to ensuring Covid-safe environments that are resilient to further pandemic shocks.

References

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Appendix

A. Chronology

	Date	Representatives	Additional documentation provided
A	26th October 2021	University Representatives: Dr Lois Fitch Veronica Strachan Brian Green Prof Moira Fischbacher-Smith Dr Kirsty Conlon	*Additional input: impact of Covid-19 on students; plans for next semester; and positive impacts of the pandemic –* Universities Scotland Submission
B	28th October 2021	CLD Representatives Marion Allison Jackie Howe Mick Doyle Tim Frew Ann Kirkwood	*Expert Advisory Group– Questions on 'Learners and Consideration of Wider Harms' 4 Harms CLD response Marion Allison – CLD Submissions*
C	9th November 2021	College Representatives Andy Witty Liz Connolly Jonny Pearson Shona Struthers	*Submission to Expert Advisory Group (EAG) on Students and Consideration of Wider Harms – Following Discussion Held on Tuesday 9 November 2021 –* Colleges Scotland Submission
D	17th November 2021	Union Representatives Mary Senior, University and College Union Lena Wånggren, University and College Union Alison MacLean, Unite the Union David Belsey, Educational Institute of Scotland Lorcan Mullen, UNISON Scotland	UCUS Report of COVID-19 survey of members Supporting Staff Wellbeing in Higher Education, Education Support
E	23rd November 2021	Student Representatives Lottie Doherty, President of St. Andrew's University Students' Association Joshua Sutcliffe, Vice President of Dundee University Students' Association Matt Crilly, President of National Union of Students, Scotland Rose Dodgson, President of Edinburgh College Students' Association (NUS rep)	*Education Committee Briefing, NUS Scotland-* NUS Submission

		Bernie Savage, President of City of Glasgow Colleges Student Association Lori Templeton, Vice President of City of Glasgow Colleges Student Association Francesca Meneghetti, Depute President, Orkney College UHI	

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