

Cross-Party Group on Colleges and Universities

Thursday 12 June 2025 1pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP

Michael Marra MSP

Invited guests

1. Jason Miles-Campbell, Director of Scotland and Northern Ireland, Jisc.
2. Chris Edwards, Senior Lecturer in the Institute for Education Technology, Open University
3. Chris Sumner, Head of Management Information Systems and Services, South Lanarkshire College.

Non-MSP Group Members

Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland
Byron Hyde, University of Leeds
Calum McNairney, Scottish Funding Council
Claire Vekic, Colleges Scotland
Conor Bradley, Borders College
Fiona Stewart, Skills Development Scotland
Frances Johnson, University of Edinburgh
Gavin McWhinne, Office of Liz Smith MSP
Georgia Marks, UCAS
Graeme Hendry, Skills Development Scotland
Heather Rattray, Interface
Ian Robotham, University of Aberdeen
Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland
Professor John Blicharski, University of Dundee
John-Paul Holden, College Employers Scotland
Jordan Burns, Office of Audrey Nicoll MSP
Kate Glendye, Dumfries and Galloway College
Keith Robson, Open University in Scotland
Lindsey Alexander, University of Strathclyde
Liz Blackburn, University of the Highlands and Islands

Matthew MacIver
Murdo Mathison, University and College Union
Philip Bale, University of Aberdeen
Rachel Currie, NUS Scotland
Scott Renton, City of Glasgow College
Susannah Lane, Universities Scotland
William Hardie, Robert Gordon University

Apologies

Audrey Nicoll MSP
Professor Gareth Miles, University of St Andrews
Judith McClure
Leigh Chalmers, University of Edinburgh
Dr Paul Little, City of Glasgow College
Rachael Treglown, Universities Scotland
Suzy Powell, Interface
Terry Brotherstone, University of Aberdeen

Welcome and Introduction

Ms Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting in the Scottish Parliament and introduced the topic of the meeting, digital infrastructure, evolution and resilience within higher and further education.

Presentations

Jason Miles-Campbell, Director of Scotland and Northern Ireland, Jisc:

- Three themes; Jisc role in digital infrastructure, transformation and resilience, support for Universities UK Transformation and Efficiency taskforce and shared services.
- Jisc help protect the sector from cybercrime by ensuring the appropriate safety measures are in place. Also provide HESA with data which provides data insights within the sector, ensure connectivity across the sector for individual needs of institutions. Transformation toolkit allows for institutions to identify actions and roadmap for digital transformation within institutions.
- Transformation and Efficiency Taskforce work builds on a report Jisc undertook with KPMG on collaborating for a sustainable future. Unlock the value of a shared approach with data and technology. Working in collaboration with Universities UK to reduce duplication of data, looking at collective investment in transformation and unlocking digital value across institutions.
- Value of Jisc includes transparency and accountability. Jisc saves the sector around £300m per year at UK level by providing a shared service. Save colleges in Scotland around £2.4m and universities £70m on digital resources and licensing tools.

Chris Sumner, Head of Management Information Systems and Services, South Lanarkshire College:

- Outlined what his presentation would cover; how the college handles its data, systems, challenges and future of data.
- Showcased new data tools including a data tracker for student numbers and their pathway through college over 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- Illustrated that data is always evolving and we must evolve with it to ensure systems can be used to their full advantage, consistently improving data systems. Also, how data must be protected from cyber criminals, ensuring a robust protection plan is in place. If data is not protected, it can leave organisations vulnerable and therefore, cyber security is essential.

Chris Edwards, Senior Lecturer in the Institute for Education Technology, Open University

- Set out the demographic challenges Scotland faces – rural isolation, ageing populations, economic inequalities and skills shortages all of which can effectively be addressed through online education that the Open University excels in.
- Offer a wide range of courses that would be accessible to all students including in the Institute of Education Technology, a Masters course taught entirely online, a short postgraduate certificate in online teaching and 12-week microcredential delivered online.
- The OU is exploring the use of AI to create an AU Digital Assistant for Personalised and Adaptive Online Learning (AIDA), also known as Taylor – ensuring each student has an online learning experience adapted to their needs.
- The University has online laboratories known as OpenSTEM Labs which allow students from anywhere in Scotland, or the world, to participate in experimental work.

Question and Answer

Liz Smith MSP

- In terms of ensuring all students feel comfortable with digital technologies, how easy do you find it to get people engaged?

Jason Miles-Campbell, Jisc

- AI and technology allows for personalisation. Place is still important for students to come to a campus and feel safe, supported and access to baseline technology. Universities also work hard to provide devices to students. We continue to work on fairness of access to devices.

Michael Marra MSP

- How great is the need for investment in transformation for colleges and universities and how are institutions matching up to this need and pace of change?

Chris Sumner, South Lanarkshire College

- Have done a lot with the money we have but there is a need for greater investment to continue digital transformation and does become a challenge. Have to reprioritise to ensure money is spent where it needs to go.

Chris Edwards, Open University

- Part of our mission to maintain our understanding of technologies. We do a lot of development through research which is funded by research funding and working with universities across the globe. We don't implement anything until we are convinced it is cost-effective and also effective for students.

Scott Renton, City of Glasgow College

- On capital funding for infrastructure, there is a need for greater funding as it is costly to replace services that are needing replaced. Security must also be paramount when changing and replacing infrastructure to maintain our knowledge. It is a very challenging environment in terms of the funding environment.

Jason Miles-Campbell, Jisc

- On the Universities UK Transformation work, we are looking into the cost of managing the sectors technical and digital legacy and recognise it does need replaced. There is now also recurrent spend rather than one off payments which can be challenging.

Liz Smith MSP

- How easy is it to get staff in colleges and universities to agree to change of digital infrastructure and use new digital assets?

Chris Edwards, Open University

- It will always be challenging when change comes as there will always be people reluctant to try a new asset but we must continue to encourage to ensuring we can deliver on the learning needs of the students, for example during the pandemic when learning completely shifted online for everyone.

Conclusion

Ms Smith closed the meeting by thanking the speakers for their contribution and insightful questions from members. She stated the next meeting will be held in September.