
News release

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Slow progress in reforming post-school education and skills

The Scottish Government's intentions to reform post-school education and skills lack a clear delivery plan. Progress is slow. The government needs to make stronger links with its wider plans across economic transformation, climate change, education and skills.

The post-school education and skills sector has a vital role in helping people achieve their ambitions and improve life chances, while helping meet the needs of a changing economy and society. But the sector faces significant financial and operational challenges.

The government's Post-School Education and Skills Reform (PSESR) programme aims to create a simpler system, more responsive to Scotland's economic and social needs. Effective partnership working is critical in delivering this. Yet there remain multiple risks to delivery, including: inadequate resourcing; weaknesses in governance arrangements and a need to still fully understand costs, impacts and outcomes.

Legislation passed in March 2026 to simplify the funding body landscape is a significant milestone. But overall progress has been slow, with a general lack of direction, oversight and resourcing. This raises risks intended outcomes won't be achieved.

Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland, said:

'There's a concerning gap between intent, planning and progress to deliver post-school education and skills reform. A lack of clarity on outcomes, insufficient skills and resourcing, gaps in governance, and uncertainty over the costs and benefits must be addressed.

'Successful reform on this scale demands understanding and engagement with all those impacted. The government needs to better communicate and work with learners, business and those working across the education and skills sector.'

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Notes to Editor:

1. Post-school education and skills provision cover learning and training through college, university, and apprenticeships. It is key to supporting people into employment, personal development, and contributes to economic prosperity.

2. The Scottish Government records that it invests over £3 billion in this sector each year, with funding is currently delivered through three public bodies:
 - Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
 - The Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
 - Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS).
3. The Scottish Government's Purpose and Principles for reform of post-education and skills provision has been informed, to different degrees, by the SFC'S 2021 [Coherence and Sustainability: A Review of Tertiary Education and Research](#) and the June 2023 Withers Review, alongside other reports which are set out in Appendix 1 of today's report.
4. In March 2026 the Scottish Parliament passed the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Act.
5. Recent reports by Audit Scotland on post-school skills and education include Scotland's Colleges 2025 and Planning for Skills. Found out more on our [learner journey from school to work topic page](#).
6. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit.scot
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