

Scotland's Tertiary Enhancement Programme: Understanding the staff development landscape required to support diverse learner journeys in the tertiary sector

Stepping Over the Threshold: Belonging and
Inclusion in Scotland's Tertiary Sector | 27th May
2026



STEP

Scotland's Tertiary
Enhancement Programme

A Terrtiary Partnership Approach

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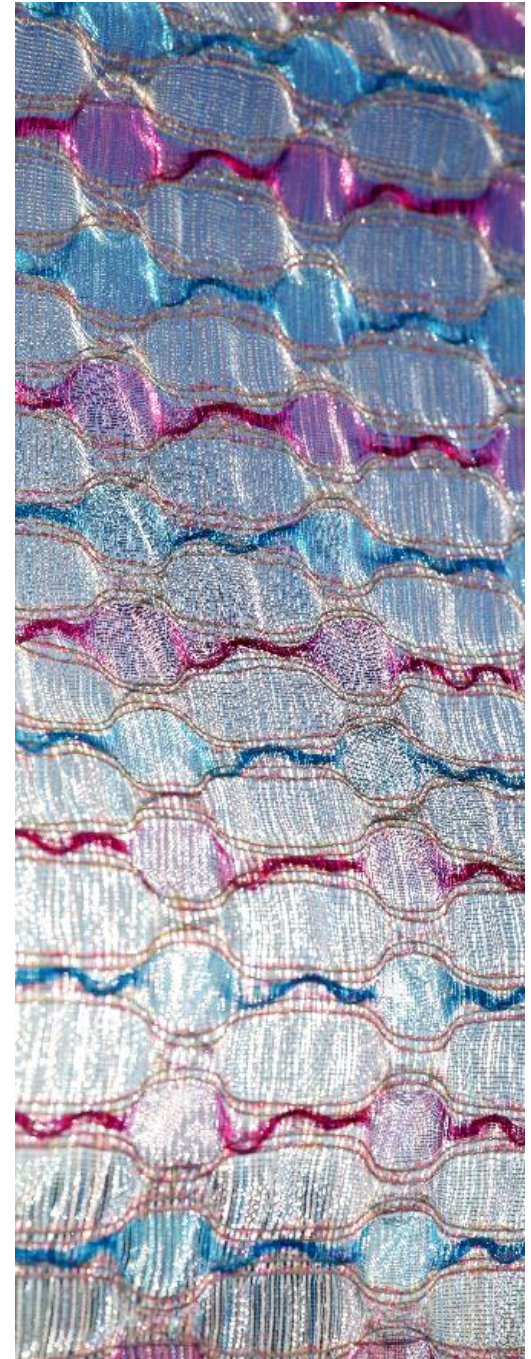
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Project Objectives

The project will deliver the following objectives:

1. *Map and compare staff development* approaches for those *who teach and/or support learning across the tertiary sector* to provide a sector analysis of current practice.
2. Identify the *current and future development needs* of those who teach and/or support learning across the tertiary sector drawing *insights from staff, students, leadership and sector agencies*.
3. *Identify existing high impact staff development activities* which enhance learning, teaching and assessment in meeting the diverse needs of our learners.
4. *Inform and support strategic approaches to the effective development of CPD* for learning and teaching to enhance the student learning experience and meet the diverse needs of our learners.



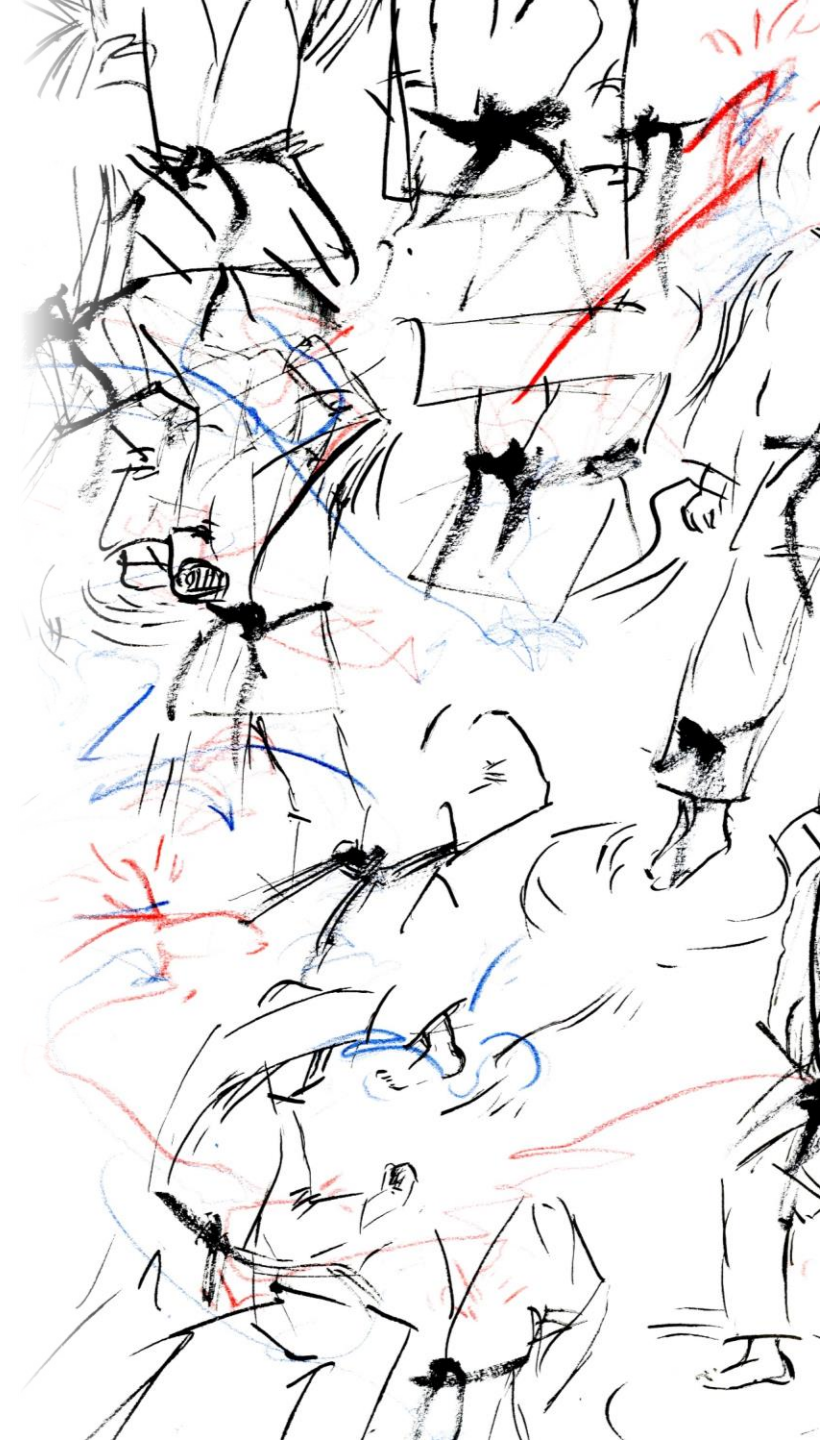
Deliverables

Year 1 2025/26

1. **State of play report:** Desk-based analysis of existing literature, policy and research on the approaches to staff development in learning and teaching across the tertiary sector and the learning needs of those who teach and/or support learning. Including a mapping and comparison of approaches to staff development and discussion of effectiveness and impact.

Year 2 2026/27

2. **Learning Needs Analysis:** through stakeholder engagement (staff, students, leadership and sector agencies) produce a learning needs analysis of those who teach and/or support learning.
3. **Future Teacher Resource:** through stakeholder engagement with students produce a resource which captures the student perspective on the future learning needs of those who teach and/or support learning.
4. **Case study:** A range of case studies of high impact practices in staff development.



Year 1: The State of Play

Undertook a literature review and analysis of existing research, scholarship, policy and strategy to explore these research questions:

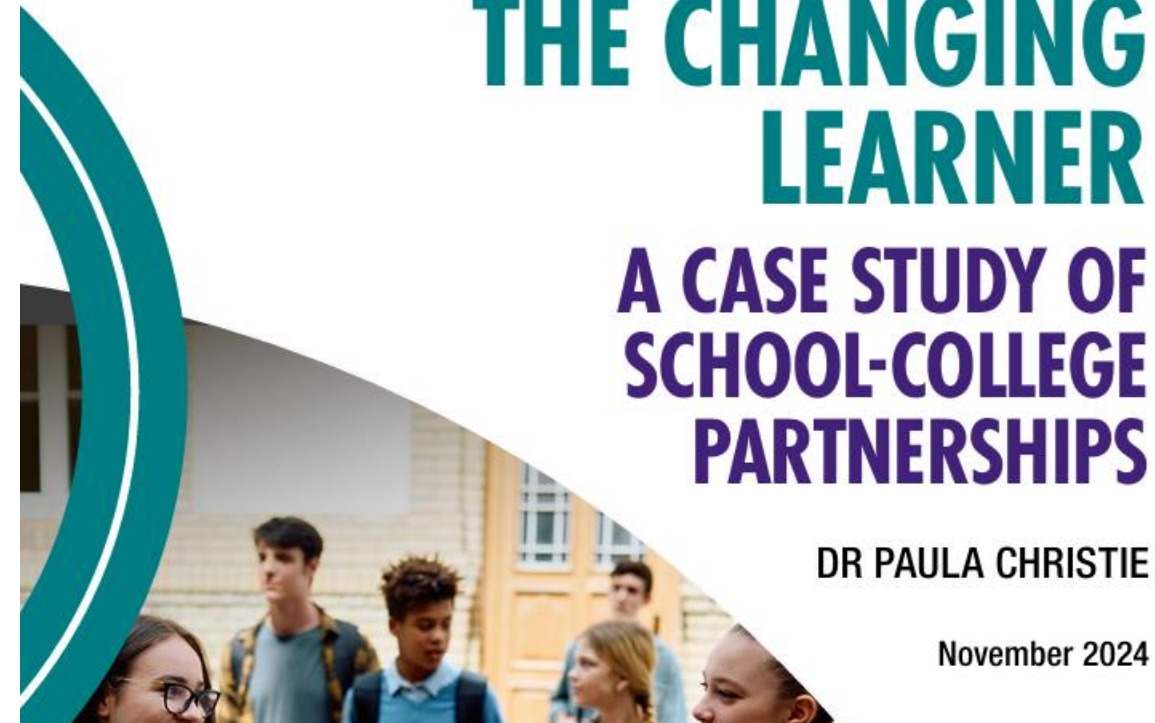
1. What are the *existing tertiary sector-wide strategies and priorities* that inform staff development of those who teach and/or support *diverse learners*?
2. Who are the *key stakeholders in the design and delivery* of staff development activities?
3. How are these *articulated and/or operationalised* at institution level?
4. What are the *development needs* of those who teach and / or support diverse learners in the tertiary sector?
5. How do institutions *evaluate the impact staff development* activities? What are the defining features (if any) of high impact practice?



What do we mean by diverse learner journeys

The tertiary student and staff populations > increasingly diverse across multiple dimensions:

- **Demographics:** e.g. age, disability, ethnicity, nationality
- **Generational**
- **Geography** – e.g. urban / rural and migration
- **Learner journeys:**
 - Differing qualification levels (1-12) and articulation pathways
 - Learners outside mainstream provision e.g. lifelong learners, incarcerated learners (Ioannou, 2023).
 - Changing learner (impact of COVID-19 and digital transformation (Christie, 2024))
 - = > highly varied transitions and journeys and greater awareness of vulnerable learners (e.g. Ebel, 2024)
- **Staff learners**
 - Diverse career trajectories
 - Changing role expectations and contracts



1. Tertiary sector-wide strategies and priorities

- **Public good vs. private return on investment (ROI):** An increase framing in economic terms, requiring a balance between academic values, employability skills development and national industrial priorities (McVitty, 2025).
- **Public trust vs. sector autonomy:** Growing political scrutiny and pressure to demonstrate value, alongside concerns about the impact of rising populism within student communities (Foster, Gannaway and Moore, 2024).
- **Teaching vs Research:** Historical prioritisation of higher education and research over vocational, technical, and further education (Hazelkorn and Locke, 2023; Anderson and Bamber, 2024; Morris, 2024).
- **Technological change vs. institutional capacity:** Rapid advances in AI and digital tools reshaping both skill needs and teaching practice > challenging capacity to adapt curricula and pedagogy.



2. Key Stakeholder and their influence

- **Institutional actors:**
 - Senior Leaders setting the strategic direction and resources to achieve this.
 - Academic and/or educational developers alongside Human Resources.
 - Responsibilities also sit with Line Managers, Programme / Curriculum Leads, local leads for educational development / enhancement.
- **Students as partners:** Student feedback, engagement and partnership in enhancement, embedding sector reference points such as the Student Learning Experience (SLE) model, supporting staff to work in partnership with students
- **External and sector bodies:** Strongly shaped by national and sector bodies - CDN, GTCS, QAA Scotland, Advance HE, awarding bodies, and professional statutory and regulatory bodies.
- **Individuals and Communities of Practice:** informal and relational forms of staff development play a critical role



3. Operationalised at Institutional Level

Strategically led: institutional strategies and quality frameworks (Fitzpatrick and Zhang, 2026) > variously articulated.

Sector aligned but key structural differences:

- Informed by (recently revised) sector regulatory requirements points (TQEF and UK Quality Code)
- Differing reference points – regulatory requirements and qualification frameworks: e.g. General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) in FE, UK Professional Standards Framework in HE
- Differing class sizes, assessment practices, geography etc **BUT** variation within sectors as well as across

Enhancement driven: Institutional priorities, enhancement agendas and projects (e.g. decolonising the curriculum, inclusive learning and teaching practice, enhancement to assessment, trauma informed approaches).

Variety of institutional staff development offerings:

- Formal quals, recognition schemes, CPD programmes and events
- Elective, relational and practice based

Integration / intersection with HR processes: recruitment, induction, probation, annual review, and promotion

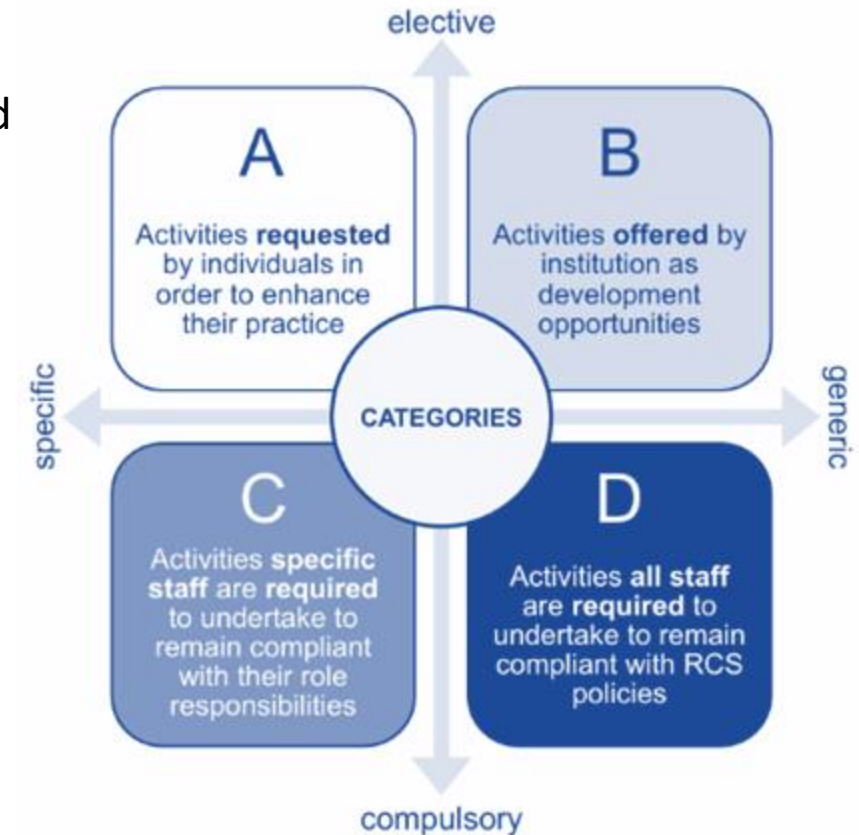


Figure - Exemplar categories of professional development provided by Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

4. Development Needs

Getting the basics right: teaching qualifications: How are staff being supported to get the basics right? What do they need right now vs. tomorrow, or next term?

Student engagement and partnership: How are staff being enabled and empowered to work with students in their development and enhancement journey

Inclusion, Sustainability and Wellbeing: How does curriculum design and content, teaching and assessment support inclusive, sustainable and wellbeing informed practices?

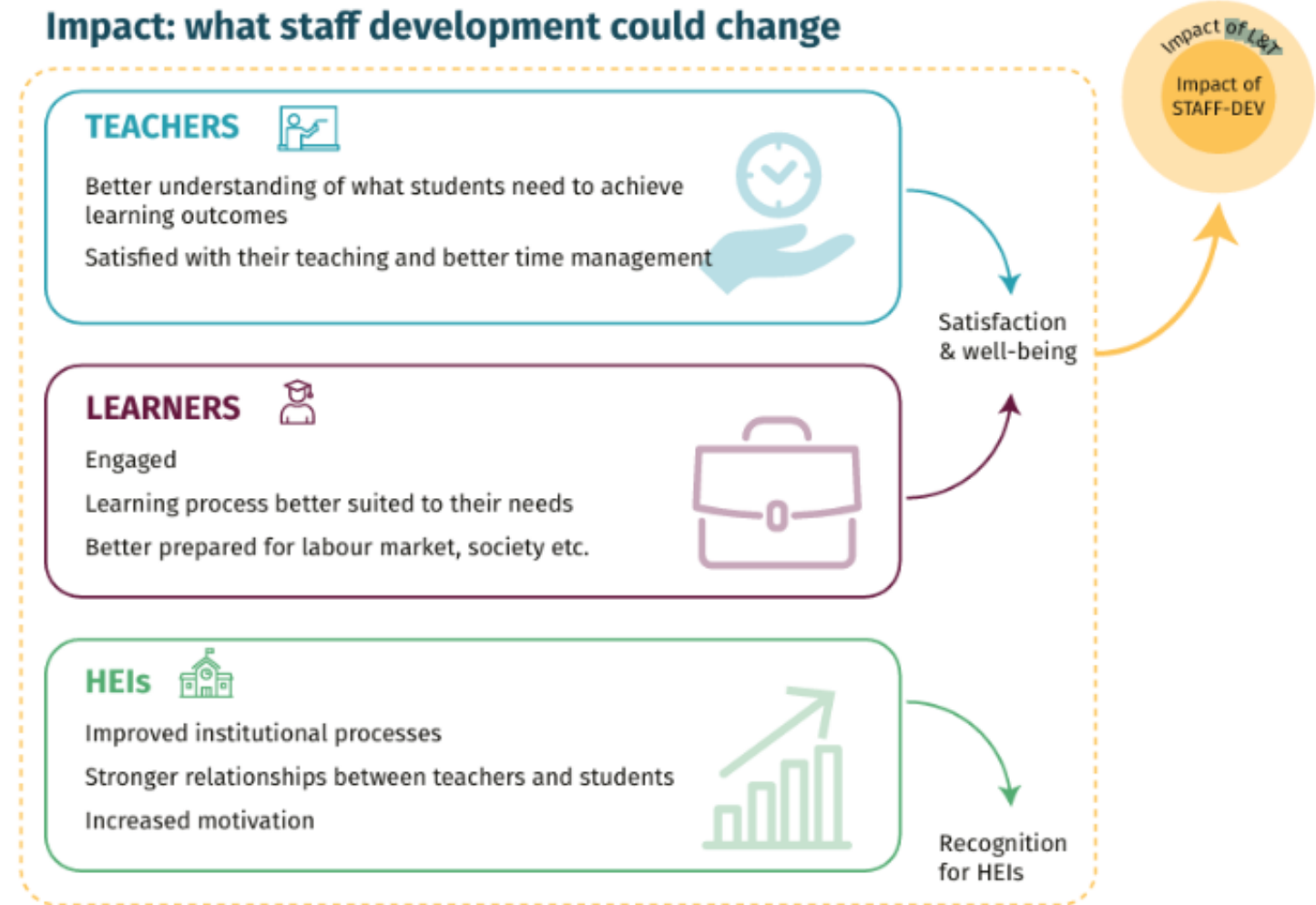
Digital, online, blended learning skills: How are staff being kept up to date with developments in digital skills, tools and technologies (e.g. Gen AI), as well as using these tools in their teaching and support for learning with students?



5. Evaluating Impact of Staff Development

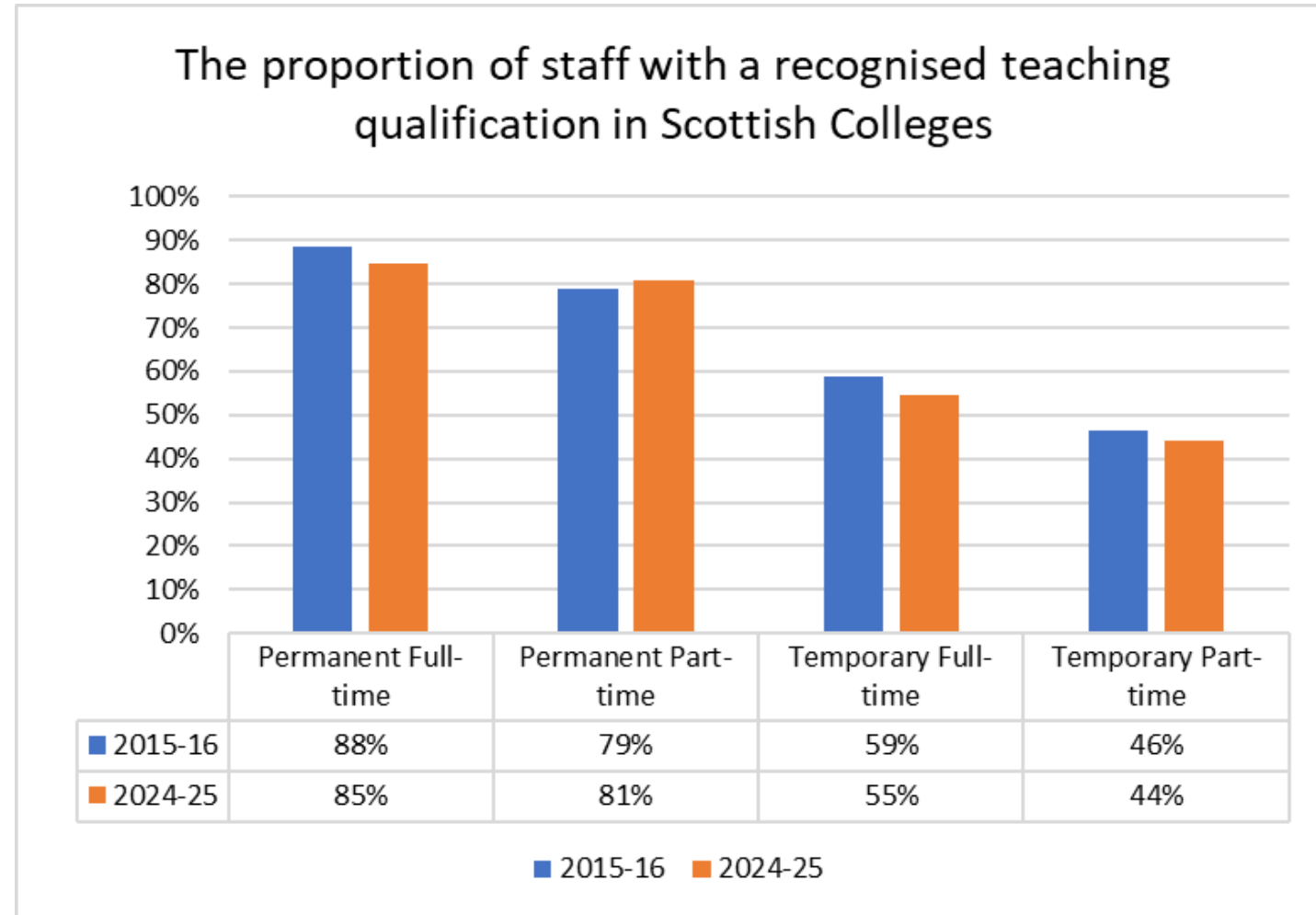
Indicators used to evaluate the impact of educator development :

- student satisfaction data
- number of teaching qualifications
- number of teaching fellowships
- staff feedback
- scholarly and pedagogical activity
- professional recognition
- number of staff mobilities
- participation in development opportunities
- teaching innovations, awards
- wider student outcome metrics



Tertiary approach to educator development – Some implications

- **Structural differences and sector coherence** (Anderson and Bamber, 2024)
- **Formal qualification - complexity and inconsistencies** (Walker, 2024; Robertson, 2026)
- **Staying future orientated**
- **Impact and evaluation**



The proportion of staff with a recognised teaching qualification in Scottish Colleges (SFC, 2026b)

Discussion

- What are the **opportunities for collaboration** in response to the challenges faced – such as, supporting diverse learners, integrating digital technologies, and responding to policy shifts?
- How can the tertiary sector deliver **foundational teaching qualifications while preparing educators for evolving challenges?** (how do mechanisms that support innovative pedagogies contribute?)
- How / should **learning and teaching qualifications** be better integrated across the tertiary sector?
- How do institutions approach **evaluation** and **balance measuring** educator development outcomes at institutional, learner, and individual levels?

