

Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce: Interim Report

Response prepared by Colleges Scotland on behalf of its members and the Regional Leads

1. Executive Summary

- The interim report of the Commission has received a warm welcome across the college sector.
- The sector is keen to see the vision outlined in the interim report taken forward, and this will require the involvement and support of a wide range of partners in the public and private sectors.

School-College Partnership Activity

- Although there is school-college partnership activity already taking place across Scotland, this is variable in its nature. The strength of partnership between colleges, schools, local authorities and employers needs to be levelled-up.
- The quantity of school-college partnership activity across Scotland has decreased over recent years, as colleges have responded to the Scottish Government's policy of focussing on full-time delivery to 16-24 year olds.
- There should be a national ambition agreed by partners for the appropriate scale of school-college partnership activity across Scotland, and joint responsibility for this should be created through replicating college outcome targets in local authority single outcome agreements.
- In the short-term the Scottish Government can support colleges and local authorities to work with employers to accredit more school-college activity with industry endorsed vocational qualifications.
- In the medium-term the Scottish Government should consider how it can use resources to expand the quantity of school-college delivery across Scotland. However, expansion can only occur through additional investment in the college sector or at the expense of other activity.

Modern Apprenticeships

- The college sector has welcomed the recognition of the value of the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programme by the Commission, as well as the interim report's recommendations in this area.
- Colleges already play a significant role in the delivery of the MA programme, both by directly holding contracts with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and through subcontracting by other organisations.
- Colleges would appreciate more involved in the programme, as evidenced by unmet demand for SDS contracts that colleges have bid for.
- There are some extremely high standards of MA opportunities that are very highly regarded, however colleges are concerned about variations in the quality of training associated with some apprenticeship provision.

General

- The interim report's recommendations in regard to careers advice are extremely important, and the college sector hopes to see these taken forward. Changes in careers advice are crucial to changing the perceptions of young people and parents towards vocational education.
- The responsibilities of employers in developing Scotland's young workforce are very important, and although colleges work hard to involve employers in a range of activities, the sector would welcome any steps that would encourage and enable greater involvement from employers. The sector looks forward to the conclusions that the Commission draws in this area.

2. Introduction

The interim report from the *Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce* has received a warm welcome from across the college sector. The strong focus on the importance of vocational education and the crucial role that colleges have in delivering vocational education for Scotland's young people is long overdue in a report of this kind.

Colleges have already begun to act where they can to implement the recommendations of the interim report. It is inevitable that there will be issues of implementation to be overcome, but if the vision set out in the interim report is to be achieved, then getting the detail right will be of crucial importance.

Although many of the recommendations set out in the interim report can be achieved by colleges acting under their own steam, many of the most ambitious recommendations will only be achievable through partnership working. There will need to be an enthusiastic response from all parts of the public sector, and more widely in society and the private sector, if we are to meet the full-scale of the challenge set out in the interim report. Truly giving vocational education in Scotland parity of esteem requires a significant paradigm shift in attitudes. That can only be achieved in part by the Scottish Government's own action; fully achieving the goal will need support, involvement and leadership from a wide spectrum of partners, including universities, schools (both local authority and independent), employers and their representative bodies, and economic bodies like chambers of commerce.

3. School/College Partnerships

Key points:

- These are strong proposals, which will improve outcomes for young people. Ensuring that the proposals are implemented successfully in partnership will be key.
- In line with Scottish Government policy of focussing college education on full-time provision to 16-19 year olds, school-college delivery has declined over recent years.
- The recommendation to introduce more industry-recognised and endorsed qualifications to school-college delivery is positive. National Certificates (NCs) and Higher National Certificates (HNCs) are a welcome suggestion, but there should be a broad consideration, with employers, of appropriate qualifications.
- A national ambition for the appropriate level of school-college partnership activity should be established. This should allow local flexibility, with different college regions contributing towards the national ambition through growth appropriate to their local circumstances.
- Targets in college regional outcome agreements should be replicated with targets in local authority single outcome agreements, recognising the shared responsibility for delivery.
- In every local authority area, there should be consistent, high quality partnership planning of vocational pathways, which enrich the curriculum offer to pupils in the senior phase. These planning structures should allow colleges and local authorities to jointly plan on an equal footing, and to involve employer organisations and others as necessary.

- In the short-term, a small amount of investment would allow colleges and schools to involve employers in planning higher quality vocational routes, and to recognise more of the existing activity with industry endorsed qualifications.
- However, if the level of school-college activity is to be expanded, this must either be done at the expense of existing delivery to other groups, or within additional investment. This can be managed through the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Consideration of this by Scottish Government would be welcomed.
- Long-term a major change in funding arrangements would be required, in order to create a vastly more flexible and learner-centric approach to this phase of education, consistent with the *Curriculum for Excellence*.

Colleges Sector Comment

The college sector supports the recommendations on school-college partnerships, set out in the interim report, and is ready to work with the Commission, Scottish Government, employers, local authorities and the SFC to see them implemented.

These recommendations can be implemented from an existing base of activity. Various forms of school-college partnership activity exist across Scotland, with colleges in all 13 of the new college regions currently engaged in some form of partnership activity with local schools. There are plenty of excellent examples of well planned, targeted and successful provision in partnership with colleges, and it is welcome that this has been recognised in the interim report. These partnerships take different forms and models, with a variety of recognised qualifications and experiences on offer to school pupils. *Curriculum for Excellence* provides the basis for this flexible approach. *Curriculum for Excellence* has flexibility and an individualised curriculum at its heart. It is worth noting that colleges have been early adopters of the *Curriculum for Excellence*, and are well on their way to fully implementing the curriculum across the full range of their activity.

In implementing the recommendations of the interim report, the college sector believes there needs to be a concerted effort to level-up the quality of partnership and delivery across the country, as there are some schools and local authorities that are not engaging to the same extent. Fundamentally, school pupils across Scotland should all have the opportunity to access to some form significant vocational education delivered in partnership with colleges.

Surveying of colleges by Colleges Scotland shows that there is a huge amount of variation across Scotland in levels of school-college activity. At one end of the spectrum there are some colleges who are planning in 2013/14 to deliver as little as 1% or 2% of their overall activity as school-college partnership activity. At the other end, there are several colleges who are planning to deliver in excess of 8% of their overall activity as school-college partnership activity. These figures show that there is a great deal of existing variation in the quantity of school-college delivery across Scotland. Some variation is a positive thing, reflecting different local circumstances in different parts of the country however, the college sector is concerned that this also reflects significant national disparities in the opportunities available to school pupils to access vocational education delivered by colleges. This underlines the need for closer partnership working between school and local authorities to plan pathways, and assess demand from young people for vocational routes.

The current experience of colleges shows that in many cases it is practical problems, for example related to curriculum planning and timetabling, that have so far limited opportunities for school pupils to take on more vocational options in colleges. Experience suggests that the quality of partnership is crucial to finding ways around these kinds of practical obstacles.

In line with colleges responding to the Scottish Government's policy¹ of prioritising provision to school leavers' studying full-time, the proportion of activity in the sector aimed at school-college partnerships has reduced over time. Each of the regional outcome agreements agreed between the SFC and each of the college regions for delivery in 2013/14 sets out a target for school-college partnership activity. Initial analysis from Colleges Scotland suggests that only an estimated 90,000 wSUMs² (weighted student units of measurement) or less than 4% of college activity is planned to be delivered towards school-college partnership work. However, analysis by this method is a slight underestimate, as in some college regions there is additional activity being undertaken that is funded exclusively and directly by the local authority.

However, initial surveying of colleges by Colleges Scotland suggests that the scale of additional activity being funded by local authorities is limited. A survey of 22 colleges accounting for 88% of Scottish colleges' activity showed that, in total, these colleges were only expecting in 2013/14 to receive approximately a further £625,000 from local authorities and to teach an additional 1,339 school pupils. This suggests that using SFC provided figures only underestimates the level of school-college partnership activity across Scotland slightly. Colleges Scotland is continuing to progress work to better understand the scale and scope of school-college partnership activity across Scotland.

In terms of qualifications, the college sector views the extension of delivery of NC and HNC qualifications into schools as a welcome suggestion. There are already a few instances where this type of provision is being piloted, and taking this forward early on through further pilots would be a positive step. The college sector would like consideration to be given to how employers and universities might be involved in planning this type of activity. The involvement of these partners would help ensure that there were a range of positive destinations for those students involved in these programmes when they complete. Employer involvement would help open routes direct into employment, and ensure that qualifications and training methods meet the expectations of employers. The involvement of universities could allow advanced entry for students who have been involved in school-college partnership activity. This could mean pupils with a HNC going into the second year of a degree course, or pupils completing a HND full-time at college and then progressing into third year at university. An important part of improving the esteem of vocational education is the encouragement of vocational routes to the full range of school pupils, and if these partners get this right, this would seem to be an opportunity that would be attractive to a broad spread of pupils, including high performing pupils.

The general goal of broadening the range of qualifications that are attached to school-college partnership activity is a positive move, as is the goal of increasing the proportion of activity for which pupils receive an industry endorsed qualification. However, as the report suggests there needs to be a continued recognition that there is a range of other important qualifications that colleges are involved in contributing to the school curriculum, including *Skills for Work*, Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), Highers and Advanced Highers. Colleges Scotland would be happy to undertake further work with the Commission and other partners to further identify those qualifications that are currently being delivered, and those that could additionally be offered to school pupils.

If colleges are to begin to work towards providing HNC qualifications to school-age pupils there will have to be some consideration of implications for student financial support arrangements. Students who are currently working towards a full-time HNC at college are eligible for receiving grant and loan awards from the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS). Students who are studying part-time for a HNC may have to pay a tuition fee or take out a loan to cover tuition costs. Younger students who are currently studying towards a NC or other non-advanced level qualification at college will

¹ Guidance letters from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to the Scottish Funding Council on the [17th November 2010](#) and [21st September 2011](#) both asked the SFC to focus colleges' activity on 16-19 and 19-24 year olds.

² This figure is an estimate, based on targets available in colleges' published regional outcome agreements and estimate figures provided by colleges to Colleges Scotland.

continue to receive Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA), if they are eligible, as they would if they stayed at school.

Past Trends in School-College Delivery

As noted earlier, there has been a decline over previous few years in the amount of delivery of school-college partnership activity, as colleges have responded to the Scottish Government policy of focussing colleges' activity on full-time delivery to 16-19 year olds.

Figures obtained by Colleges Scotland from the SFC show this trend clearly at a national level:

Table 1

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2013/14 (projected)
Total wSUMs delivered as school-college partnership activity	187,958	180,806	176,864	129,315	90,000*
Total Headcount of students on school-college partnership activity	63,992	61,649	54,206	26,710	20,000*
% of total college wSUMs delivered as school-college delivery	7.8%	7.4%	7.2%	5.6%	4.0%*

* approx figures

These figures reflect the number of students taking part in SFC funded school-college activity that meets the Scottish Government's definition of school-college activity³. This definition has been in use by SFC since 2008. To meet this definition the activity in the college by the school pupil has to be an agreed and planned part (i.e. by the school or local authority) of that pupil's curriculum.

Headcount is the total number of students involved in educational activity. WSUMs are a measure of college activity that has been weighted for the intensity of the pupil's course, as well as the cost of delivering different types of courses. WSUMs are best understood as a measure of the intensity of teaching activity undertaken by the college. They are also the measure that has, up until now, been used by the SFC to fund college activity, and have thus been the most consistently applied measure of activity over previous years.

The final row shows that over the years for which there is data available, there was also a significant fall in the percentage of total activity (i.e wSUMs) that these colleges were delivering as school-college partnership activity. This shows the initial impact on school-college partnership activity of the Scottish Government's policy of focussing colleges' activity on full-time delivery to 16-19 year-olds.

Although the figures in the above table are the most definitive representation available of the level of school-college activity over the immediately preceding years, the levels of school-college activity in colleges can also be understood over a longer period by looking at the numbers of school pupils taking college courses, as recorded in the SFC's [Infact database](#). This covers a slightly different (and less accurate) definition of school-college activity, however it is able to provide a longer-term picture of the development of activity for school pupils in colleges. Collation of figures by Colleges Scotland on this basis shows the following historical trends:

³ A flowchart illustrating the types of activity by students that meet the Scottish Government definition of school-college partnership activity can be accessed [here](#).

Table 2

Year	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2013/14 (projected)
wSUMs	87,922	107,630	145,400	167,558	171,260	158,805	118,377	90,000 ^{4*}
Headcount	38,986	47,792	81,777	87,560	79,855	64,624	36,004	20,000*
FTE		5,204	7,042	8,256	8,291	7,805	6,354	
SFC Funding	£6.6m	£13.8m	£18.8m		£39.7m ⁵			

* approx figure

These are all different forms of measurement of college activity. Headcount is the total number of students involved in activity. Full-time equivalent (FTE) takes account of the amount of delivery being offered to students. WSUMs are further weighted to also take account of the cost of delivering different subject types.

The funding figures in the years from 2005/06 to 2007/08 are taken from previous letters of grant provided by the SFC to colleges. This funding was made available from the then Scottish Executive's strategy *Lifelong Partners*⁶. By 2009/10 the funding of school-college partnership activity had been mainstreamed as part of the overall allocation of wSUM funding to colleges. The figure for 2009/10 is calculated from the amount of wSUMs that were ring-fenced by giving colleges targets for school-college partnership activity, and their corresponding wSUM £ value at the time. For 2010/11 specific targets for school/college partnership activities were removed, and £26m of corresponding college funding was removed.

As noted before, these figures only show school-college activity that has either been ring-fence funded by the SFC, or where colleges have made their own decision to allocate some of their SFC funding for teaching to school pupils. However, since the separation of colleges from local authority control, there have been various instances of contracts being agreed between schools and colleges for additional delivery, on top of that being funded by the SFC. This means that across all years there is a potential underestimate of delivery of school-college activity.

However, a survey of 22 colleges (accounting for 88% of college activity across Scotland) carried out by Colleges Scotland, showed that this additional contribution to the cost of training by local authorities and schools has generally been at low levels across all of the most recent years.

Table 3 – Total annual funding from local authority or local individual schools received by colleges to fund school/college partnership activity

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
£743,331	£683,614	£617,380

Source: Colleges Scotland survey of 22 colleges

This shows that, using SFC figures to track school-college activity over recent years is very close to accurate in showing the level of school-college partnership activity taking place. It also shows that in recent years it has not been possible for local authorities to use their own funds on a large scale to support school pupils to undertake vocational education in local college settings.

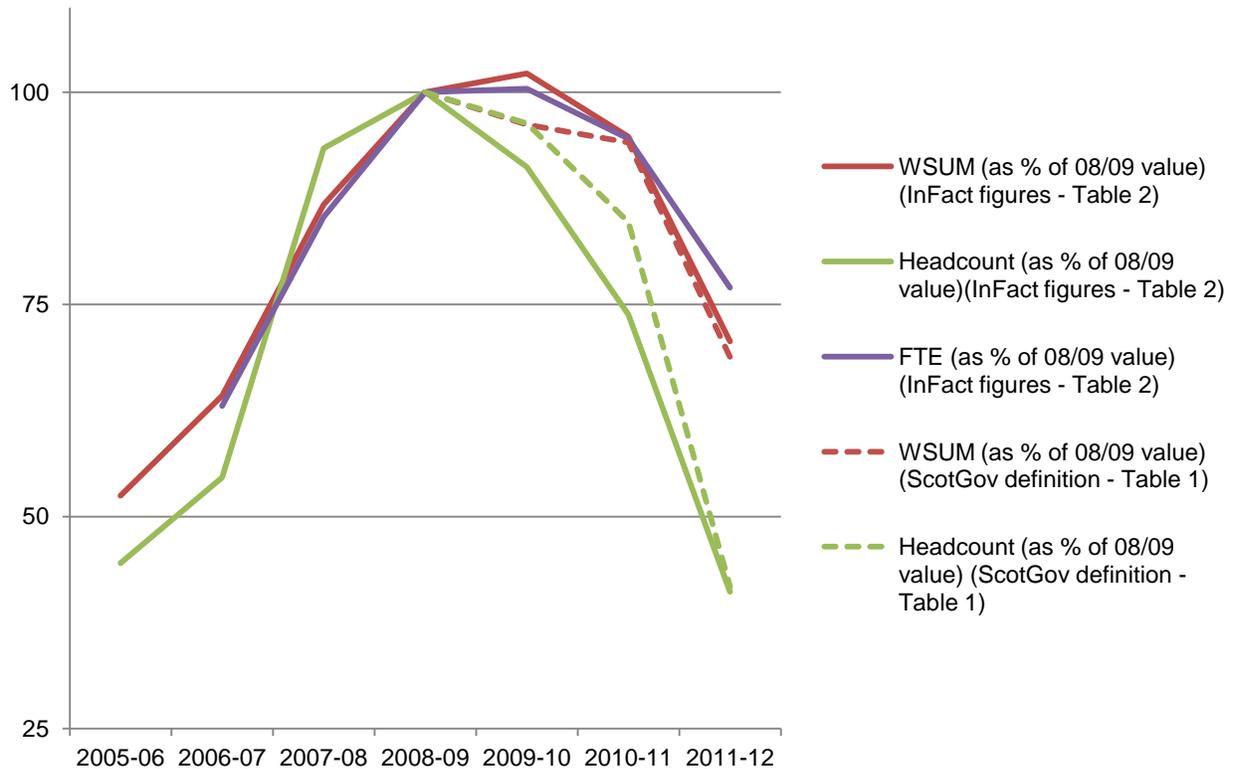
⁴This figure is an estimate, based on targets available in colleges' published regional outcome agreements and estimate figures provided by colleges to Colleges Scotland.

⁵In this year there was no specific funding allocated to colleges for school-college delivery, as school-college funds had been mainstreamed into overall allocations. However, colleges were expected to use 8.3% of their funding towards school-college activity. This figure reflects 8.3% of the total college activity funding.

⁶The *Lifelong Partners* strategy was published by the then Scottish Executive in May 2005 and is available [here](#).

There is a small further financial contribution being made by local authorities in some parts of Scotland, through the convention that the local authority pays the travel costs for school pupils taking college courses, and for some extra materials needed for training. However, this is not uniform across Scotland, and further guidance from Scottish Government to standardise this would be welcomed by the college sector.

As the following graph shows, regardless of which unit and which definition of school-college activity is used to describe the level of activity, the pattern of change in school-college partnership activity is broadly similar. The Scottish Government definition figures are the only accurate enumeration of the level of activity. However, this graph shows that using the proxy of collated numbers of school pupils taking college courses, provides a broadly accurate reflection of patterns of change, over a longer time period.



Over the whole period, the graph shows that the number of school pupils taking college courses almost doubled between 2006/07 and 2008/09, before declining back by 2011/12 to a level below the 2006/07 level. The wSUM and FTE figures show similar patterns. By 2011/12 the level of activity was around 70% of the maximum level of activity in 2008/09.

These figures illustrate that between 2006 and 2008 the extra funds that were allocated through the *Lifelong Partners Strategy*, were successful in delivering increased college delivery for school pupils. Continued ring-fencing in the following years of wSUMs for school-college partnership activity was successful in protecting the level of school-college partnership activity. However, the combination of removing the ring-fence and implementing a policy of focussing on full-time delivery for 16-19 year old students has resulted in a steep decline in school-college partnership activity since 2009/10.

In conclusion, a sustainable funding and planning arrangement will be crucial to securing increased levels of vocational school-college partnership activity.

How Could Improved Vocational Education in Schools Work?

Extending the availability of school-college partnership activity is an important goal, and requires the full commitment of the college sector, local authorities and the Scottish Government. On that basis, The college sector has welcomed that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning has already made reference to the implementation of the interim report in his recent letter of guidance to the SFC⁷, including asking the SFC to engage with the college sector, COSLA, local authorities and Education Scotland in implementing the recommendations in the short to medium term.

In taking forward the implementation of these recommendations, we are able to start from a position of widespread existing school-college activity. This makes the goal of making progress in the delivery of vocational education to school pupils in the short to medium term very much achievable.

There is currently school-college partnership activity taking place in every college region in Scotland. However, the scale, type and quality of this delivery is variable across different parts of Scotland, and even within college regions. From Colleges Scotland surveying of colleges, it is clear from existing experience that the key to achieving improved and expanded school-college activity is strong planning and partnership working between colleges and local authorities. Joint planning and commitment is crucial to overcome some practical obstacles, particularly for example in curriculum planning and timetabling, if flexibility and choice of college options are to be built in for school pupils.

If progress is going to be made in levelling-up the scale and quality of school-college provision, it is therefore vital that the shared responsibility of colleges and local authorities for delivery and planning of pathways is replicated with a shared accountability that is recognised formally through existing mechanisms. Colleges, as a result of regionalisation and the introduction of outcome agreements, are well placed to do this. As mentioned earlier, the majority of college regions already have a target for delivery of school-college partnership activity in their outcome agreement with the SFC. However, although in many cases these targets have been discussed with local authorities, these targets are not replicated within local authorities' single outcome agreements. If accountability is to be shared, this needs to be addressed.

Finally, if responsibility is to be truly shared, accountability for the attainment and success of these pupils also needs to be shared. This will ensure that, for example, school pupils on school-college programmes receive guidance and support that acts as a 'wrap around' both parts of their studies. To this end, Education Scotland should develop a specific approach to reviewing arrangements for the delivery of vocational qualifications through school-college partnership that reflects the shared responsibility of local authorities and colleges. Education Scotland performance indicators and the senior phase benchmarking tool should also both reflect the delivery of school-college vocational education. The recommendations in the interim report that reflect this are welcome.

The partnership approach also needs to be applied to the estates strategies required for delivering on vocational education provision for school pupils. The estates strategies of school and colleges need to become much more closely aligned than is currently the case. Many colleges, although not all, have benefited recently from investment in their campuses, and many colleges have worked with employers to develop world class, industry-standard training facilities. Most schools will be unable to replicate these type of facilities, and therefore every effort needs to be made to, where possible, make use of these existing facilities for the benefit of as many of Scotland's young people as possible.

⁷ Guidance letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning to the Scottish Funding Council on the [21st October 2013](#)

There is also limited existing evidence about the current scale of employer involvement in the planning of school-college partnership activity. An immediate step that could be taken to improve the quality of existing school-college partnership activity would be measures to address this. There is clear evidence from experience that the involvement of employers is extremely effective in helping to design pathways for young people that lead to good rates of post-study employment. Short-term, a small amount of funding would allow some pilot areas to develop stronger vocational elements to the senior phase. The college sector is of the view that crucial to the success of any pilot activity is a strong partnership approach between the relevant local authority(ies) and the college, as well as the involvement of employers.

How Might Improved Vocational Education in Schools be Funded?

Ideally, a sustainable planning system would allow flexible funding arrangements to be agreed on a partnership basis, where the funding can support a learner centred system, with the funding following the student regardless of institutions.

However, in the medium-term, the most straightforward way of extending school-college partnership activity would be through building on the existing school-college partnership arrangements.

The Scottish Government's recent draft budget announcements were welcomed by the college sector on the basis that a flat cash settlement would allow the sector to broadly continue what it is providing currently. However, it also means that any additional future activity, may only be done at the expense of current activity. Therefore, as the college sector moves towards a new funding system, one way to increase the quantity of school-college partnership activity would be as part of this to introduce ring-fenced funding through the SFC.

Colleges Scotland analysis suggests that in the most recent year for which there are figures (2011/12) just under 12% of school pupils in S4-S6 were involved in school/college partnership activity that was being funded by the SFC. To extend this, so that a quarter (25%) of S4-S6 pupils who have remained at school can secure educational opportunities at a college as part of their *Curriculum for Excellence* based studies, would require an extra £12.5m⁸ to be invested in school-college partnership activity through the SFC. This would have to either be additional resource, or be realigned from other, existing, SFC priorities. If the Scottish Government wishes to take the latter approach, it needs to be clear about which existing priority groups would be de-prioritised.

There is a strong case that is made as part of the interim report for increased investment into vocational education at an earlier stage in young people's education, and the potential return on investment that this will bring. Although the college sector has doubts, as mentioned above, that an expansion in school-college activity can happen in the short-medium term without increased investment, there is clear evidence that investment will have very positive benefits. There is a clear link between the level of educational attainment, employment and economic and social impact. The college sector strongly supports the conclusion of the interim report that increased investment in school-college activity would bring positive economic and financial benefits through improved attainment and increased employment of young people.

⁸ This figure is based on the assumption that the current average intensity of course undertaken by pupils on school-college partnership (i.e. the ratio of headcount to wSUM) does not change. However, it might be the case partners (i.e. colleges, local authorities, employers etc) would like to see the intensity of the college portion of school-college partnership grow, in order to meet the definition of significant vocational education. In that case, this cost would be higher.

The College Sector Suggests

In order to further advance the Commission's recommendations, the college sector suggests:

- A national ambition for the level of vocational education delivered through school-college partnerships should be agreed between the college sector, industry, CoSLA and the Scottish Government.
- This national ambition should be established in the Scottish Government's *National Performance Framework*, as suggested by the interim report from the Commission (Recommendation 5).
- The targets for school-college partnership activity that are established in college regional outcome agreements should be replicated with targets in local authority single outcome agreements, demonstrating cross-organisational support for common objectives.
- There should be a requirement set out through single outcome agreements for each local authority area to have an established, shared strategy for the design and delivery of vocational pathways in the area. As the lead specialist vocational bodies, the local college should have an equal role within community planning partnerships (CPPs) in leading the joint planning and delivery of these strategies. In each local authority area there would now be a single regional college, assigned college or regional board that would be able to take this leading role.
- In the medium-term, as suggested in the interim report (Recommendation 5), the Scottish Government, local authorities and regional college boards should work together to reach an early agreement on the resourcing of these proposals.
- A small amount of funding could be used by willing college regions and local authorities, to work with local employers to identify and pilot the introduction of new forms of industry endorsed qualifications (HNCs are just one example discussed in the interim report), to be delivered to school pupils as part of school-college partnerships.
- Ultimately, in the long-term a major shift in funding and planning arrangements is required to deliver a fully flexible senior phase for Scotland's young people. Eventually, a funding system where the funding follows the students, regardless of institution, could be implemented through allocating funding for vocational activity directly to partnership planning groups in each CPP area.

4. Colleges and Employability

Key points:

- Colleges are focussed on business and employment outcomes, but there is scope for development.
- The Commission's interim report recommendations (Recommendations 3 and 4) build on existing best practice and the current direction of travel, for example the 'developed workforce' sections of college outcome agreements.
- Involvement of colleges in regional economic development should become more consistent.
- In the second half of its work, the Commission should be realistic in its expectations of employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to engage unsupported in the education system.

College Sector Comment

All colleges have a strong business-focus in their work, and many have a long history of engaging with local employers. This includes board membership by employers, involvement of business in designing bespoke training solutions, the involvement of colleges in local economic development strategies, the provision of work placements and work experience as part of courses and so on. There is plenty of experience in the college sector of business engagement and there have been many successes, but this experience has also shown that success requires a very significant investment of staff time at all levels to initiate, maintain and develop these relationships.

Experience also shows that improving relationships between colleges and employers will be extremely beneficial in the long run, improving the quality of education and training that colleges provide, and ultimately the employment outcomes for students. The recommendations of the Commission's interim report in this area are all sensible, and support existing best practice in the sector, as well as the existing direction of travel.

In particular, regionalisation provides an opportunity for colleges to improve their partnership activities. Experience shows that membership of colleges of regional level strategic economic development (e.g. CPPs, regional economic development forums, and chambers of commerce) is valuable for all parties involved. Membership of some of these bodies is the case in many regions already, but a more consistent application of this would be beneficial.

However, for partnerships to be successful, it needs to be two-way. The harsh reality of recession has meant it has become increasingly difficult for employers to engage in the education system, something they do not always see as their core business. The college sector is looking forward to working with the Commission, as it develops ideas about this in the second half of its work. One key point is that realism needs to be applied with regard to the capacity of businesses, particularly SMEs, to achieve this unsupported. The pressures of running the business on a day to day basis, inevitably limit the amount of free time available for engaging in other work such as supporting the education sector. The Commission may therefore wish to consider what ways in which employers can be supported to become involved both directly on an individual basis, as well as on a collective (local or sectoral) basis.

All of the existing regional outcome agreements recognise employability and developing Scotland's young workforce as a key area of work. However, further work is still required to develop appropriate outcomes to support work in this area. In particular, the development of a single destination survey of college students will help improve the identification of employment outcomes in outcome agreements.

Modern Apprenticeships

Key points:

- Colleges are already involved in some way in the majority of modern apprenticeships (MA). However, they are only directly contracted for a small minority. The majority of their involvement is through sub-contracting from other contracted providers.
- The burden of bureaucracy involved in contracting for MA delivery should be reduced. The creation of a highly trusted status for some organisations would support this.
- The Commission should consider further the merits of moving to a more efficient model of contracting, based on regional need of employers and young people.
- Creating advanced skills networks would allow colleges to better meet the needs of national employers looking for advanced skills solutions. The Energy Skills Partnership is one such model, but a flexible approach would allow best integration with employer led groups.
- Further work from the Commission to develop recommendations about the quality of MA programmes would be welcomed. In particular, the college sector has concerns about lack of consistency in the provision of off-the-job training and in the length of apprenticeships. Scotland lags behind the best performing European countries in these areas.
- There are also significant equality and diversity issues in the MA programme, and these require in-depth investigation.

College Sector Comment

The college sector strongly supports the positivity of the interim report to the MA programme. There is no doubt that apprenticeships have proved over the years to be a hugely valuable route to employment for many people, and created in many industries a skills pipeline that has delivered a stronger workforce. Recommendations in the interim report about increasing the scale of the programme, and further increasing its profile, have therefore been welcomed by the college sector, and we hope to work with partners to see these recommendations taken forward.

Current Involvement of Colleges in Modern Apprenticeship Programme

Colleges would welcome becoming more involved in the direct contracting of MA delivery by SDS, as the interim report recommends (Recommendation 3). Colleges are already involved in some way or another in the delivery of a very large number of MAs. Although colleges are only directly contracted by SDS for a small portion of the MA programme, there is a large 'hidden' involvement of the college sector.

A large part of colleges' involvement in the MA programme is through the practice of some organisations contracting directly with SDS for MAs and then subcontracting some or all of the MA's training element to colleges. This type of provision varies widely, from providing training to support a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ), to health and safety training prior to apprentices going into workplaces, to more general *Skills for Work* type delivery.

Colleges Scotland recently surveyed colleges about their involvement in the MA programme. 23 colleges responded to the survey, together reflecting 90% of college activity across Scotland. The survey showed that together these colleges had been directly awarded just over 2,500 MA starts by SDS, or approximately 10% of the total MA starts that SDS award each year. However, the survey also showed that these colleges were expecting to be involved in training almost a further 3,000 MAs in 2013/14 through subcontracting. As these figures only reflect instances where there is some sort of formal agreement between the college and the other organisation holding the MA contract, it is possible that the 'hidden' involvement of colleges in the MA programme is even greater. When colleges are delivering part-time courses to students, for example stand alone SVQs or health & safety courses, they may not always be made aware that the student is also a MA or apprentice of some sort.

The survey also highlighted that there was a large amount of unmet demand from colleges to be involved in the MA programme. Over recent years there was a large difference between the number of contracts that these colleges had bid for, and the number that they had been awarded. For example, in 2012/13 the surveyed colleges had, collectively been willing to deliver 56% more MA starts, than they had been awarded. In 2011/12 there was a willingness to deliver an extra 84% more starts.

Table 4

SDS Financial Year (April to March)	Delivered in 2011/12 (AY)	Delivered in 2012/13 (AY)	Estimated for 2013/14 (AY)
<u>Where College Holds SDS Contract</u>			
Total MA starts that were <u>bid for</u> by these colleges (by headcount of starts):	4,330	3,682	3,630
Total MA starts that were <u>awarded</u> , to these colleges (by headcount of starts):	2,358	2,359	2,513
Percentage extra starts these colleges were willing to deliver:	84%	56%	44%

In addition to colleges not being awarded the full amount of contracts they had bid for, there are a number of further barriers to greater involvement of colleges in the MA programme. Firstly, the distribution of the MA programme is structured through a complex annual tendering process. This is a resource intensive process for SDS, colleges, training providers and employers, and creates unpredictability and risk in the system. In the short-term, in pursuit of the Commission's aim of expanding colleges' involvement in the programme, colleges would welcome opportunities to work with the Commission, the Scottish Government and SDS to reduce the bureaucratic burden of applying to the system. In particular, some form of highly trusted status for those organisations who are applying on a regular basis would be a positive step.

The suggestion in the interim report that colleges are evaluated for their involvement in the MA programme through the regional outcome agreements, is a positive suggestion. However, in the long-term, the college sector would welcome further consideration by the Commission of the possibilities presented by moving MA contracting to a need-based system, where MA contracts are allocated much more closely on the needs of the local economy and young people. Current patterns of allocation, for example, do not necessarily match youth unemployment patterns across Scotland. Colleges, post-regionalisation, are ideally placed to bring together the needs of employers and young people on a local level and put in place the necessary training support. In particular, when specialist provision requires sustainable capital investment and maintenance and when employment and career options for specialist staff needs to be recognised, the annual tendering process undermines effective planning, investment and efficiency. A further advantage of this shift would be for colleges to take a much greater role in facilitating and supporting local employers to identify their skills needs and potential solutions. This is particularly the case for SMEs who often have little available human resource (HR) capacity. Colleges would welcome opportunities to take a greater lead role in regional skills investment planning, which SDS have been working toward for some time, and post-regionalisation colleges are ideally placed to do so.

The creation of national advanced skills networks is a further proposal which would support the Commission's goal of increasing the involvement of colleges in the MA programme, and of the development of advanced vocational skills opportunities in general. Perhaps starting in the key sectors, advanced skills networks would bring together colleges involved in similar areas of advanced delivery. This would allow colleges to develop national networks of skills excellence that were able to support large national employers with local skills solutions. The Energy Skills Partnership provides one model for this, but a flexible approach would allow the strongest possible interaction between skills networks and employer groupings, such as industry leadership groups. This would interact well with the regional nature of colleges, allowing vocational skills to be delivered to support local needs, as well as to support national high-level skills requirements. This would also support the Commission's objective of greater alignment of the MA programme with the national key sectors.

In general, the college sector welcomes proposals to increase the scale of the MA programme, over time. Successful apprenticeship systems with strong take up are a key feature of those European countries that are doing better than Scotland in terms of tackling youth unemployment. However, any expansion should be firmly based, as the interim report suggests, on a continued commitment to improving the quality of apprenticeship training. The college sector agrees that there is a particular need to work with employer bodies to expand the number of higher level MA frameworks, particularly at Level 4 and above. It would also be useful to involve professional bodies and universities in discussing how to take forward this part of the interim report.

Quality of Modern Apprenticeships

Fundamentally, the college sector sees the MA system as a combination of education, employment and training, agreed between employee and employer, and with a training provider on hand to facilitate the relationship and provide specific education and training support. The MA pathway, as noted by the Commission, is increasingly seen by employers and young people as a valuable and positive route. Indeed, there are a number of instances across Scotland where there are extremely strong examples of this kind of partnership bearing fruit, with colleges being involved in the delivery of some of the most successful and prestigious MA programmes in Scotland. A common thread is a strong partnership between the college and the employer, with the college kept closely up-to-date with workforce planning, and the college able to draw expertise, advice and facilities when designing and delivering specific training components for the employer.

However, whilst there are some examples of ‘gold-standard’ apprenticeships, which are highly regarded (i.e. have a level of parity of esteem), this is not consistent across the MA programme. In order to take the whole of the programme to another level, achieving greater parity of esteem with other pathways, it will be necessary to look at the quality of education and training that is currently used to support the MA programme.

The college sector therefore welcomes the proposal from the Commission that Education Scotland’s responsibilities should be extended to cover the MA programme. Given that extensive external quality assurance arrangements are in place to cover academic pathways, providing equivalent scrutiny of vocational pathways will help support greater parity of esteem in educational terms for the MA programme. The precise details of how an external quality assurance system is developed for the MA programme will be important. An assurance system will need to take account of the core principles of the MA, and also, as far as possible, the core features of external assurance in comparable parts of the post-16 education system. There are a number of college staff who are heavily involved in the design and delivery of the MA programme, and The college sector would be pleased to assist in the implementation of these proposals.

As there is currently no external quality assurance of the MA programme, there is an incomplete picture of the quality of delivery of MAs in Scotland. However, as outlined below, there is some evidence that the quality of the educational experience for the apprentice, defined in broadest terms, can be variable.

SDS carries out its own surveys on the MA programme and reports strong satisfaction from employers and apprentices with the fundamentals of the MA programme. SDS’s [Modern Apprenticeship Outcomes 2012](#) report found that 70% of apprentices were very satisfied with their apprenticeship, and 87% were either satisfied or very satisfied. Similarly, the SDS [Modern Apprenticeship Employer Survey 2012](#) found that over half of employers (54%) involved in the programme that had been surveyed would strongly recommend MAs, and a further 28% would recommend with some reservations, constituting a total of over 80% who would recommend MAs.

However, the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS) report [Apprenticeship Pay Survey 2011](#), which surveyed more than 2,000 apprentices in Scotland, showed some stark figures in terms of apprenticeships in Scotland:

- 1 in 7 MAs surveyed (14%) were receiving no training (neither on-the-job nor off-the-job) at all as part of their MA.
- A further 37% of MAs surveyed were only receiving on-the-job training.
- In total, more than half (51%) of MAs surveyed were receiving no training other than during their everyday work.

The college sector would like all apprentices to be provided with a guarantee that their educational experience includes off-the-job training, to provide them with a theoretical and general education that can support their lifelong career progression and mobility. This should sit alongside and support the apprentice's on-the-job training. This could be based on a minimum requirement for the equivalent of a certain amount of training per month, in relation to the length of the apprenticeship. This would compare well with the European countries (such as Germany and Switzerland) where the apprenticeship systems are strongest, and the youth employment rates highest, and where all apprentices receive specialist and general off the job education in order to supplement the training that they receive in the workplace.

The college sector has concerns on the current length of apprenticeships. Correspondence between SDS and the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee⁹, shows that there is huge variation in the length of time it takes to complete MAs. For example, it took the 942 young apprentices (16-19) who completed the Level 2 in Retail in 2011/12 an average of just seven months to complete. Nor is this simply a matter of level of apprenticeship, with Level 3 apprenticeships in Information and Communication Technologies and in Youth Work taking young apprentices an average of just 10 months to complete. At the other end of the spectrum, MAs at Level 3 in Construction, Electrotechnical Services and Engineering were all taking an average of almost four years for young apprentices to complete. Level 2 apprenticeships in Vehicle Maintenance and Repair and in Construction were also taking young apprentices on average more than 20 months to complete.

Whilst some variation in length is a good thing, reflecting variety in prior qualification and the fact that the apprentice can learn at their own speed, such huge variation presents concerns about lack of consistency in the quality of delivery in the MA programme. In particular, the very short length of time that some courses are being completed in is a cause for concern, and raises questions about whether these apprentices are genuinely getting a rounded education experience that will set them up for a successful future career. This is something that the Commission should look more closely at, and consider whether there is a case to be made for tighter standards on the length of MAs.

Equality and Diversity

There is a well-documented and recognised gender issue in the uptake of the MA programme. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)¹⁰ also notes that uptake of MA opportunities by young people with disabilities and young people from ethnic minorities are both lower than average. The college sector is pleased to note that the Commission is intending to examine these issues in greater detail in the second half of its work, as previous initiatives have failed to make a significant impact on these worrying figures.

These imbalances in uptake of different apprenticeships have a series of equally worrying consequences. EHRC¹¹ research shows that gendered biases in uptake of certain frameworks mean that, in Scotland, the average spend per male apprentice is 53% higher than spend for female apprentices. As previously mentioned, the average length of an apprenticeship can vary widely. Colleges Scotland analysis, based on SDS figures¹² and research by academics at Heriot-Watt University¹³, also suggests that this has a gendered effect. The frameworks that are mostly taken up by men, take on average twice as long to complete as those frameworks that are dominated by women apprentices, suggesting that men may be receiving far more skills training as part of their MAs.

⁹http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/General%20Documents/Danny_Logue_Letter.pdf

¹⁰http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Scotland/Research/modern_apprenticeships_final.pdf

¹¹http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Scotland/Research/modern_apprenticeships_final.pdf

¹²http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/General%20Documents/Danny_Logue_Letter.pdf

¹³http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Scotland/Research/part_1_final_report_170713.pdf

Table 5: Most Female Dominated Frameworks

	2012	
	% Female	Average Completion Time (16-19 Year Old Apprentices)
Early Years Care and Education	96.8%	17 months
Hairdressing	92.7%	17 months
Health and Social Care	84.4%	11 months
Business Administration	74.3%	11 months

Table 6: Most Male Dominated Frameworks

	2012	
	% Female	Average Completion Time (16-19 Year Old Apprentices)
Electrotechnical Services	1.0%	47 months
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair	1.2%	40 months
Construction	1.3%	44 months
Engineering	2.6%	44 months
Driving Goods Vehicles	6.6%	14 months

The college sector looks forward to the results of the Commission’s future deliberation of equality and diversity aspects of the MA programme, and hopes that the Commission will be ambitious in the proposals it makes to tackle these issues.

5. Role of Employers

As the Commission progresses through the second half of its work, there is a good deal of scope for it to make significant further recommendations about the role of employers. The college sector looks forward to engaging further in this process, and to implementing the Commission’s recommendations in partnership with employers.

One area where The college sector would welcome further consideration by the Commission is the possibility of opportunities to link public procurement to the development of young people’s skills. We would encourage the Commission to engage with any opportunities that are presented by the current consideration of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Bill¹⁴ by the Scottish Parliament. A range of options would exist, from preferential treatment for tenders that include provision of MAs and other community benefits, through to stronger requirements for these kind of actions to be put in place in order to be eligible for some contracts.

A crucial part of facilitating better partnerships between colleges and employers is the availability of accurate Labour Market Information. The college sector would welcome consideration by the Commission of what recommendations could be made in this area.

Prior experience of the college sector also shows that many of the most effective interventions by employers with young people, have been those that have occurred over a sustained period of time, and have involved the employer having a relationship with an individual young person. The college sector would encourage the Commission to consider this experience as it formulates further conclusions through the second half of its work.

¹⁴ <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/68170.aspx>

6. Careers Advice in Schools

The college sector strongly supports the recommendations (Recommendation 2) made by the interim report in regard to careers advice in schools. If we are ultimately to achieve parity of esteem for the vocational pathways on offer to Scotland's young people, then attitudes across society will have to change. There is therefore a huge role for careers advice to play with young people, and their parents, in changing those attitudes. Although progress is currently being made, the college sector therefore hopes to see over time a paradigm shift in the way vocational opportunities are presented, and hopes that the interim report's recommendations in this area are taken up with enthusiasm by all of the necessary organisations.

Employers and universities also have an important role to play here, in terms of how vocational qualifications are seen, and the college sector would like to be involved in discussions alongside these partners on how to take forward these recommendations. Lastly, there will also need to be education of school pupils and parents about the opportunities available through enhanced school-college programmes.

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Response prepared by on behalf of its members and the Regional Leads