

Colleges Scotland's Submission to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee – Article 50 Inquiry

1. Introduction

Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests with the aim that colleges are at the heart of a world-class education sector that is recognised, valued and available to all. Colleges Scotland, as the membership body, represents all 26 colleges in Scotland that deliver both further education and around 28% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

2. Areas of Concern

The key areas of concern that the sector has in relation to Brexit are around the uncertainty in relation to:

- Funding
- Some of our students
- Some of our staff
- Non-financial benefits e.g. cultural exchange programmes.

Colleges in Scotland have a history of attracting staff and students from around the world and leading on key overseas projects, and we want to maintain this work and relationships with our European partners at all levels.

It is vital that both the Scottish and UK Government's pursue every possible avenue and option to enable our staff, students and projects to continue in the new landscape, following the Brexit negotiations.

3. Colleges Play a Key Role

The college sector plays a key role in providing support to a thriving and growing economy. A sustainable college sector brings positive benefits to learners, society and the economy and allows Scotland's colleges to contribute to the Scottish Government strategies and policy direction. Colleges in Scotland:

- play a vital role in contributing to increased productivity and economic growth through the training of a skilled workforce and delivering skills and process innovation, particularly for SMEs
- are the key deliverer of the skilled workforce needed to work in a modern economy
- are focused on skills and process innovation i.e. delivery and design, industry engagement, networking, bespoke and transitional training, transfer of skills and knowledge exchange
- have a key role to play in encouraging and supporting an innovative economy, facilitating knowledge transfer of skills for innovation within the economy, providing business incubator space and ensuring access to resource to aid start-up of ventures.

Further details on the benefits that colleges bring to learners, society and the economy are outlined in Annex 1.

4. Key Asks

Our key asks at this time, are for the Scottish Government to both work closely with the college sector, through Colleges Scotland, and undertake to use all available channels to ensure that the positive impact of colleges right across the UK is not negatively impacted by Brexit, and to provide a base that actively supports colleges in all that they do for learners, society and the economy.

Colleges Scotland is also seeking proactive interventions from both Scottish and UK Government's in relation to mitigating the impact of a loss of EU funding. Such interventions could take the form of an alternative funding source and the establishment of domestic lead programmes to allow individuals to participate in meaningful exchange projects, in order to mitigate the impact on the sectors' success in a global economy from loss of access to EU programmes.

5. EU Funding Programmes – Employability

The various funding programmes received by colleges in Scotland are used primarily to provide employability training for those Scottish domiciled people who are further from the workforce. That is, provides vital training to allow individuals to move on from their current circumstances, and to be in a position to enter the workforce and contribute positively to society. Employability training allows people to move from drawing on public funds to contributing tax for the benefit of public finances and the economy.

There are two main college projects which are significantly funded by the EU and which make up the bulk of college income derived from the EU. These are:

- Developing Scotland's Workforce (DSW)
- Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

The table below sets out the EU funding received directly by the college sector in relation to programmes under the European Social Fund (ESF):

£m	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
DSW	4.3	4.3	13.3
DSW – Highlands & Islands	2.8	5.5	7.0
YEI	13.9	14.9	0
Total	21.0	24.7	20.3

In addition, a recent survey of the college sector undertaken by Colleges Scotland identified a further approximately £1.5m of direct EU funding through other programmes that some colleges received. These other programmes included European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Erasmus and Creative Europe.

6. EU Funding Programmes – Capital

The various capital funding programme arrangements administrated by the EU have, over a considerable period of time, provided vital resource that has been instrumental in the provision of significant capital projects throughout Scotland. However, in some rural areas, most of the capital work undertaken over recent decades has included at least some form of EU funding. It is important not to under estimate the impact of the loss of EU capital funding would be.

7. Students in Colleges

Students have benefitted from EU funding which ensures places are available, in state-of-the-art college campuses, with the opportunity to undertake study or placement within Europe either through the Erasmus+ scheme or other mechanisms.

The system, by which EU students are entitled to access education with the equivalent standing to Scottish domiciled students, has ensured our campuses are diverse and our students experience different cultural and educational perspectives to their own thus enhancing their academic, social and cultural knowledge.

8. Staff in Colleges

Colleges have benefitted from freedom of movement of people as a result of membership of the EU. Participation in EU Framework Programmes has enriched the talent pool for staff, where ease of travel has afforded opportunities for UK staff. Consideration should be given to providing new and additional safeguards to protect a withdrawal of EU talent from the UK, including a similar exemption for other skilled educators and highly-skilled staff.

As of 31 March 2017, there were 11,064 people employed in colleges in Scotland. Three percent of staff in colleges are non-UK EU nationals.

9. Cultural Exchange Programmes

The opportunity for student exchange within Europe enriches the learning experience, enhances employability and promotes greater understanding and respect of different people and cultures. Colleges Scotland considers programmes such as Erasmus to be extremely beneficial and it would be a considerable loss if some equivalent arrangements are not introduced as the UK leaves the EU. Consideration should be given to whether any negotiated settlement would allow continued participation in programmes like Erasmus for our students to be able to study abroad, and to facilitate EU students to continue to study in the UK. Alternatively, a replacement structure should be set up to allow the benefits of exchange programmes to continue to be available to Scottish students. It should be noted that Scotland's colleges serve learners from the most deprived circumstances, for whom such provision made available through the education setting may be their only opportunity for travel outside of the UK.

10. Wider Economic Opportunities

The potential wider economic opportunities as a result of Brexit are recognised. However, the challenge is that as a consequence of the stated desire for immigration restrictions, the college sector is unlikely to be in a position to take advantage of these potential opportunities.

11. Summary

Colleges have a significant positive effect on learners, businesses, communities and the economy. At this time, we are seeking an assurance that these beneficial impacts are taken into account during Brexit negotiations and that the college sector is supported and underpinned by the outcomes from the negotiations. In addition, we are seeking assurances that the loss of EU funding will be offset by mitigating Scottish and UK Government action, and that a way is found for the continued participation in the opportunities provided by cultural exchange programmes.

Colleges Scotland
18 August 2017

Benefits that Colleges Bring to Learners, Society and the Economy

1. Contribution to a Strong, Sustainable Economy

Colleges contribute towards a strong, vibrant and diverse economy as well as to sustainable economic growth. They contribute by providing relevant high quality professional and technical education and training to ensure that learners acquire the necessary skills to enter the workforce. Colleges contribute to competitiveness by producing people with the right skills who are work ready and positioned to support businesses, encourage innovation and build entrepreneurialism. Colleges help produce a workforce of greater productivity and skill, allowing more people from all backgrounds to participate in the labour market. Courses and curriculum are designed to take account of the skills needs that are identified on a regional basis so that there is increased certainty that students will have the appropriate skills to move into jobs. Colleges also have the flexibility and adaptability to respond to the needs of businesses in relation to training to address skills gaps and help businesses remain competitive through an efficient, skilled workforce.

2. Internationalisation

The college sector has the huge potential to contribute to this agenda by bringing benefit to the economy, through inward investment from abroad and by providing opportunities for global learning and connectivity. Traditionally, Scotland's colleges have been active players in the international market, both in terms of recruiting international students and pursuing markets to identify commercial opportunities. There are a number of colleges who continue to be leaders in specialist niche markets with considerable potential to attract more international business and enhance Scotland's reputation in those markets.

International students enrich the experience of UK students by providing a more diverse pool of students with a broader global perspective. The cultural exchange benefits everyone as well as helping to promote Scotland internationally. Support from the Scottish Government for the re-introduction of a post-study work visa, which the UK Government ended in 2012, would attract overseas students thus enriching the college experience for all, whilst retaining skilled graduates who contribute to our economy.

3. Contribution to the Student and the Learning Experience

Colleges are in a strong position to help deliver on both increasing youth employment and up-skilling for adult learners. The current focus in Scotland of ensuring our young people have the necessary work skills is supported by the college sector, both in the expansion of the links between schools and colleges and in the vital role colleges play in developing engagement between employers and education in their regions.

Colleges also provide a vital element of learning throughout life, helping those who need to update their skills before returning to the workforce or those who have been made redundant to retrain and up-skill in order to return to the workforce.

4. Contribution to Strengthening our Communities

Colleges empower individuals and help strengthen communities. Working closely with businesses, communities and local agencies, colleges are at the centre of economic development and

regeneration in Scotland. They play a critical and valuable role in delivering the skills, competencies and learning that fuels the economy and enables students to train, retrain and contribute.

The learning provision offered by colleges enables individuals and families to get out of poverty and increases a person's life chances. Colleges offer particular opportunities to women returning to the workforce. Reaching out to disadvantaged hard-to-reach groups within their communities not only leads to a steady supply of students for higher-level qualification-based study but also supports colleges wider role in promoting the wellbeing and cohesion of their communities.

Colleges promote fairness, offering people life chances and equality of opportunity to learn. Enrolling in college helps those furthest away from the labour market to move towards employment and supports those with few or no qualifications to achieve a better education.

Colleges are well placed to make a real difference to attainment levels and encourage young people to develop the skills the nation needs. Colleges also assist adults in retraining and up-skilling, allowing students to benefit from lifelong learning and gain the skills to access work.

5. Inclusive Growth

Colleges are in a unique position to ensure that the contribution to growing the economy is undertaken in such a way that the benefits are delivered in an inclusive and fair way as possible. Colleges tackle inequality through a wide variety of means, including:

- widening access to people from across the socio-economic spectrum
- working towards improved gender balance
- working in partnership with many organisations from across the public, partner and third sector
- signed up to a living wage commitment as employers.