

Submission to the Education and Skills Committee – Budget Priorities

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Education and Skills Committee regarding the Draft Scottish Budget 2018/19. Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests with the aim of ensuring that colleges are at the heart of a world class sector that is recognised, valued and available to all. Colleges Scotland, as the membership body, represents all 26 colleges, which deliver both further education and around 28% of all higher education in Scotland.

In response to the letter from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, in which he details his budget priorities for 2018/19, Colleges Scotland has set out below the budget priorities for the college sector.

Spending Review Submission

In its Spending Review submission to the Scottish Government for the 2018/19 period, Colleges Scotland outlined its investment priorities:

- Maintenance of revenue funding in real terms with some recognition of additional cost pressures facing the sector in order to continue progressing the Scottish Government's policy objectives and deliver the quality and volume of activity.
- Funding to enable colleges to achieve the Scottish Government's policy of implementing National Bargaining in Scotland's colleges.
- Backlog capital maintenance investment, following the recently commissioned estates conditions survey, in order to support the Scottish Government's ambition that Scotland is the best place in the world in which to grow up, be educated, live, work and do business and respond to rapid technological change.

This investment will enable colleges to deliver the Scottish Government's ambitions for learners, communities and the wider economy.

Colleges Scotland, in its Spending Review submission, set out a credible request for both the necessary investment in the college sector, for 2018/19 and subsequent years, and the development of the transformational agenda which provides innovative solutions for the tertiary education landscape. This will enable Scotland's colleges to maximise their potential to deliver:

- sustainable and innovative institutions
- skilled and successful learners fit for Scotland's future workforce
- a stronger economy and fairer society.

Scotland's colleges are key to delivering the Programme for Government's ambition to shape the kind of Scotland we all seek – an inclusive, fair, prosperous, innovative country, ready and willing to embrace the future. The right investment in the college sector is vital to achieving this shared vision. Key areas where investment in colleges is helping to deliver on national objectives include:

- closing the educational 'attainment gap' between people from poorer and more affluent backgrounds
- maintaining the best youth employment statistics in the UK
- doubling free nursery provision

- delivering strong 'positive destinations' figures in terms of young people moving into work, training or higher/further education
- better gender balance in the labour market
- better value for the taxpayer
- delivering the skilled workforce to meet the needs of employers to improve productivity.

Scotland's colleges provide a national network with a regional focus that has demonstrated its ability to respond quickly and effectively to Scottish Government policy direction. No other sector has the ability to reach the businesses, communities and individuals who are at the heart of the government's change agenda. The investment identified by the sector is essential to ensure:

Sustainable and Innovative Institutions

- A flexible response to regional needs, in order to produce the skills that businesses and Scotland's people need.
- Linear and non-linear learning and skills journeys successfully completed, as envisaged and being delivered through the Learner Journey Review, supported by the Colleges Scotland Think Piece on the Learning and Skills Journey.
- Regional Outcome Agreements are delivered against key strategic aims.
- Greater innovation, in order to increase productivity and grow the Scottish economy.

Skilled and Successful Learners Fit for Scotland's Future Workforce

- Employability courses, providing opportunity to those further from the workforce, to ensure a closure of the attainment gap.
- Delivery on the STEM agenda.
- Vocational, technical, professional and higher education development for young people, fully contributing to the Developing the Young Workforce strategy.
- Increased work based learning opportunities, in order to grow opportunity and productivity.

Stronger Economy and Fairer Society

- Delivery of the Scottish Government's equality agenda through provision of education and development, including a disproportionately high level of people from the most deprived areas of Scotland, and provision of education and development opportunities for adult returners – building equality of opportunity.
- Widening access and closing the attainment gap, in order to raise attainment levels and drive forward the recommendations of the Commission on Widening Access.
- Continuing improvement in gender balance in the workforce.
- Provision of vocational, technical and professional education and development, in order to increase productivity and grow the Scottish economy.

Learner Journey

The key priority of the education budget for 2018/19 must be to support the development of the work around the Learner Journey. In Autumn 2016, ahead of the commencement of the Scottish Government's 15-24 Learner Journey Review, Colleges Scotland published its own Think Piece¹ on the potential opportunities presented by streamlining the learning and skills journey.

Colleges Scotland has been advocating the implementation of a more co-ordinated framework across schools, colleges and universities, along with key partners. The Think Piece set out initial thoughts from the college sector around what a potential co-ordinated learning and skills framework could look like – one which has the progression of the learner at its heart, with particular consideration given to transition between school-college and college-university pathways.

¹ <https://collegesscotland.ac.uk/briefings-and-publications/851-think-piece-the-learning-and-skills-journey/file>

The development of the learner journey should be based on the following principles:

- Learners must be given full recognition for their prior attainment as they progress between institutions without unnecessary repetition of any Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level unless it is the interest of the learner (e.g. in order to change career direction or to consolidate learning).
- Learners should be able to progress flexibly and not be inhibited by systemic or institutional factors.
- All learners should have equal access to a consistent and coherent post-16 learning framework.
- Learner choices should be informed by comprehensive, objective and transparent advice and guidance.

The commencement of the Education (Scotland) Bill through the parliamentary process, following publication of the Scottish Government's proposed changes to school governance, must be utilised and appropriately funded to support the school-college interactions, and to support the above principles. In particular, the proposed Regional Improvement Collaboratives offer an opportunity for consideration of a regional level curriculum offer across schools and colleges, in response to the identified regional skill need requirements.

Building on the regional scale of the college sector in Scotland, and with the appropriate interaction with the school sector, will provide opportunity for preventative spend. This will be delivered through a more efficient transition between pre-16 and tertiary education, as well as through the provision of vocational, technical and professional education for learners at the most appropriate place, and savings through economies of scale of both schools and colleges working strategically at a regional level.

Preventative spend can also be achieved through implementation of the above principles across the college-university transition. This can be achieved through, for example, standardising the articulation routes by moving to a '2+2'² or a '2+1'³ model of delivery of an honours or ordinary degree respectively. This would ensure that all institutions give the same recognition for the same qualification when the learner is applying to the same or similar course at the same SCQF level. These would assist in shortening, but not reducing the benefits, of the learner journey, thus helping to produce a workforce of greater productivity and skill, allowing more people, from all backgrounds, to participate in the labour market more quickly and bringing greater economic benefit.

Capital Strategy and Climate Change

Whilst the investment ask that Colleges Scotland has set out in its Spending Review submission refers to backlog capital maintenance, the sector has identified the need for a strategic approach to capital investment as key to taking forward the necessary investment to allow the college estate to be able to deliver the right curriculum offer in the right places, and in appropriate conditions.

These investments, in both capital and backlog capital maintenance, will also tackle climate change and a budget priority for 2018/19 should be to continue to roll out and fund climate projects across the college sector. In future spending reviews, the outputs from a strategic approach to capital will need to be considered.

Attainment Gap

In his letter to the Education and Skills Committee, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, sets out the priority of a 'relentless' pursuit of the delivery of excellence and equity in Scottish education, and as part of this to ensure that every child has an equal chance to fulfil their potential.

² '2+2' model, means where the first two years of education towards an honours degree is undertaken at a student's local college, before articulating into year 3 and completing the final 2 years at a university in order to complete the honours qualification

³ '2+1' model, means where the first two years of education towards an ordinary degree is undertaken at a student's local college, before articulating into year 3 and completing the final year at a university in order to complete the ordinary degree qualification

The college sector, as mentioned previously, is key to assisting in delivering the closure of the 'attainment gap'. The Sutton Trust report⁴, published in May 2016, highlights the vital role that the college sector has played in widening access, stating that "*The improved access for disadvantaged students in Scotland ... has been met almost entirely by the expansion of sub-degree programmes in Scottish colleges. Since 2006, 90 per cent of all the growth in entry into Scottish higher education by disadvantaged students has been through sub-degree courses in colleges*".

The report helps demonstrate the importance of prioritising funding towards the college sector in the pursuit of equity. In addition, the Scottish Government should consider the extension of the Scottish Attainment Challenge funding to colleges, as this is where the most impact can be made.

Enterprise and Skills

The creation of the Strategic Board for Enterprise and Skills, following the Enterprise and Skills Review, is a key opportunity to ensure a joined-up approach to skills. Colleges Scotland is looking to the newly formed Strategic Board to drive the agenda in order to ensure any gaps and overlaps between the roles and remits of the agencies are dealt with effectively and with clarity. Colleges Scotland would expect decisions on funding would reflect the priorities that emerge from the Strategic Board.

Early Years and Childcare

A key policy area for the Scottish Government, and another example of the vital role colleges play, is in relation to early years and childcare. The extension of free childcare places to 1,140 hours per year for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds is a Scottish Government commitment. The training of the large numbers of additional nursery workers and managers who are required to fulfil this commitment will be delivered by the college sector, and a budget priority should be to ensure adequate and sustainable funding for colleges in the training of the necessary workforce.

Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF)

Colleges welcome the opportunity to progress the implementation of the FWDF which has provided a resource of £10m to the sector to help increase Scotland's productivity through up-skilling the existing workforce. Colleges Scotland is committed to maximising the benefit of the FWDF and we believe this will demonstrate that this fund should be extended, both in terms of being available in future years, and in the level of funding from the Apprenticeship Levy allocated to this fund.

Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)

Mr Swinney's letter correctly identifies the DYW programme as a further example of where preventative spend has brought early intervention to youth employment, creating strong links between schools and colleges in order to deliver a significant reduction in youth unemployment.

As the DYW programme has reached its mid-term point, there is a timely opportunity in relation to the proposed creation of the Regional Improvement Collaboratives to develop a partnership leadership model, where a common approach and consistent policy implementation is seen between key stakeholders who support and deliver across the education and skills landscape.

A 'Regional Skills Hub' model could be adopted that encompasses schools, colleges, universities, local authorities, Skills Development Scotland, employers and Community Planning Partnership, and which could provide a framework for the much needed joined up approach.

⁴ The Sutton Trust, May 2016, *Access in Scotland - Access to higher education for people from less advantaged backgrounds in Scotland* http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Access-in-Scotland_May2016.pdf

The potential role of the 'Regional Skills Hub' would be to:

- develop a collaborative vision for post-compulsory education (including senior-phase education in schools) for that region
- maximise the number of young people progressing to further and higher education
- increase the proportion of disadvantaged learners progressing to higher levels and sustainable positive destinations
- improve the employability of all learners
- implement standardised articulation routes
- diversify the choice of courses available to learners in schools
- streamline and personalise learner journeys
- establish common applications processes
- eliminate duplication
- use resources more cost-effectively e.g. consider shared services where appropriate
- share data amongst relevant institutions
- improve career advice and planning.

Student Support Review

The Independent Review of Student Financial Support in Scotland⁵ was published on Monday 20 November 2017, setting out an ambitious set of recommendations. In response, the Scottish Government should take forward as a priority the considerable benefits, which can be achieved for a relatively small increase in funding, that could be achieved in the provision of financial support for those undertaking further education.

Summary

It is evident that an investment in the college sector brings positive benefits to learners, society and the wider economy, and allows Scotland's colleges to contribute to Scottish Government strategies and policy direction.

The vision of both Colleges Scotland and the college sector supports the Scottish Government's policy intentions in relation to:

- achieving the Scottish Government's target of 116,000 FTEs
- providing a positive learner experience
- a seamless Learning and Skills Journey
- improving attainment
- DYW
- widening access to higher education
- tackling inequalities
- expanding opportunities across all socio-economic groups
- providing equality in education
- enhancing the skills of those in the workforce
- strengthening the economy through improving productivity and innovation.

Scotland's colleges contribute hugely to Scotland's economy, communities and individuals. They are uniquely positioned within communities to enable access to the acquisition and development of the vocational, technical and professional skills and knowledge required for successful careers, delivered in a way that emphasises fairness and equality.

The vital role fulfilled by colleges helps break the cycle of deprivation and enables people who may not otherwise have done so to access work – increasing a person's life chances. In doing all of this, colleges play a key role in taking forward, and achieving the ambitions of the Scottish Government,

⁵ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/11/3884>

of individuals, communities and businesses. This key role of colleges should be supported by decisions prioritising the budget in areas which assist the college sector to fulfil its critical role.

Colleges Scotland
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