

Empowering Schools A Consultation on the provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill



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RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

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- Individual
 Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

Colleges Scotland

Phone number 01786 892100

Address

Argyll Court
Castle Business Park
Stirling

Postcode

FK9 4TY

Email

policy@collegesscotland.ac.uk

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We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

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Response to Empowering Schools: A Consultation on the Provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill

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, which deliver both further education and around 28% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on the provisions set out in the Education (Scotland) Bill.

2. General Comments

Colleges Scotland recognises that, whilst the Education (Scotland) Bill focuses on schools, reform in the pre-16 education system will have an impact on the college sector, in particular Regional Improvement Collaboratives and professionalisation of the workforce. Colleges have close working relationships with schools and any proposed reforms should take this into account. Going forward, colleges' contribution to this agenda will be significant.

Shared vision, collective commitment and system wide collaboration are required to address the variations in levels of educational performance across Scotland. In the context of the Scottish Government's educational reforms we believe this can only be done by developing different ways of working and bringing together capacity across geographical areas, ensuring colleges and other key stakeholders are round the table.

We would like to highlight that, at the same time as educational reforms are taking place, there are also a number of developments occurring around the Enterprise and Skills Review. The Skills Alignment project that has come out of this review has significant implications for the education sector. We believe that the current education reforms and the Skill Alignment project would benefit from taking better account of the implications and demands that skills alignment requirements will place on the education sector.

As colleges play such a fundamental role in Scotland's education landscape we would be keen to see the college sector represented on the Scottish Education Council chaired by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP.

3. Regional Improvement Collaboratives

Colleges Scotland recognises that the Scottish Government's aim in establishing Regional Improvement Collaboratives is to facilitate partnership working across a region to deliver educational improvement and develop a focus on raising attainment and closing the attainment gap.

In June 2016, the *Delivering Equity and Excellence in Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland*¹ report described the objectives of the Education (Scotland) Bill as being to increase stakeholder involvement and devolve decision making to schools and communities at a regional level:

“The reforms are designed to ensure that parents, colleges, universities and local employers can better support efforts to raise attainment and ensure that young people progress to positive destinations”².

We note that the Education (Scotland) Bill will provide the legislative underpinning for Regional Improvement Collaboratives to allow them to fulfil their agreed functions which will include:

- Regional priorities and regional improvement plans
- Professional learning and leadership
- Curriculum support
- Sector specific support
- Improvement methodology
- Sharing good practice and the impact of research.

We believe that dialogue and interaction with colleges during the development and operationalisation of Regional Improvement Collaboratives is of fundamental importance, to ensure that a regional approach to curriculum and skills development involves both schools and colleges working together, including the potential for either sector to lead different areas of curriculum development.

A number of models of regional collaboratives are beginning to emerge, and as they are not yet fully constituted, are still to develop in depth, pace and impact. Going forward, to ensure that collaboration is sufficiently integrated across the education system, further work is required to scope out how stakeholders, including colleges, will be involved in the work of Regional Improvement Collaboratives.

The development of Regional Improvement Collaboratives must take into account the regional focus of colleges as determined by their Regional Outcome Agreements. For example, the Regional Improvement Collaboratives split UHI across three different Regional Improvement Collaboratives: the West, the Northern Alliance and Tayside. Potentially, this could cause difficulties for colleges when they develop regional or sub-regional wide strategies to meet targets that are set out in their Regional Outcome Agreements, as elements related to the senior phase may become disaggregated. Furthermore, with the geographical areas covered by each Regional Improvement Collaborative not aligned to college regions, Developing the Young Workforce regional groups or already established regional economic partnership boundaries, there is a risk that a focus on schools has the potential to cause fragmentation and duplication across the education system.

Regional Improvement Collaboratives must reflect the significant role local partners will play in the delivery of system wide improvement in the education sector. In his remarks to the Education and Skills Committee on Wednesday 29 November 2017, Professor Graham Donaldson³ stated that:

“as far as the total package is concerned, the challenge is not so much whether the structural changes are right or wrong; everything hinges on the extent to which the relationships between the various stakeholders in the process are strong, constructive and positive ...”

We recognise that Regional Improvement Collaboratives have the potential to bring together and deliver a network of skills and talent from across the education landscape, if implemented appropriately. At a local level, we believe that any reform initiatives must be driven by needs identified within each region, whilst reflecting national priorities. Colleges have a fundamental role to play in this – their scale, knowledge and influence, and their already established connectedness to the communities around them, makes them an invaluable partner during this process.

¹ Scottish Government, *Delivering Equity and Excellence in Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland*, June 2016. <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/06/3853>.

² Ibid, p.10.

³ <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11239&mode=pdf>

It is important that the Regional Improvement Collaboratives must be established in such a way that the interface with employers is strengthened, re-shaping this as necessary by deploying the education sectors combined scaled up strength in bringing benefit to the emerging regional economies. There is the potential that this could be done in line with the outputs from the Enterprise and Skills Review.

We acknowledge that annual regional planning should help provide focus to all partners involved in a Regional Improvement Collaborative. We believe there should be a requirement that Regional Improvement Plans should reflect school improvement plans and Skills Development Scotland's regional needs assessments while maintaining a focus on aligning work with the aims of Developing the Young Workforce and Scotland's Economic Strategy.

A focus on supporting curriculum improvement through Regional Improvement Collaboratives, especially in relation to skills, will need to involve colleges as they already have targets for school provision in their outcome agreements. These shared targets should be reflected in the Regional Improvement Plans. In so doing, care must be taken to ensure this does not cut across the intensification process as set out in college's Regional Outcome Agreements.

Both colleges and schools have aligned targets in relation to Developing the Young Workforce partnership working and the delivery of vocational qualifications at SCQF level five and above, as part of the senior phase. Through the Headteacher's Charter, we believe that, in devolving autonomy to head teachers, care must be taken to ensure that delivery is not duplicated, and the opportunities presented by a combined curriculum offer are not lost, or college sector targets made more difficult to reach. At a regional level, it has to be ensured that there is cohesion across the curriculum to support agendas, such as widening access.

Devolving authority over a large degree of the school curriculum to head teachers, also poses the question as to whether or not colleges will now have to engage with schools on an individual level. Taking into account both economies of scale and the targets that colleges are required to meet, engaging with schools on an individual level would represent a further inefficiency on what is already a challenging activity for colleges.

We urge the Scottish Government to recognise that colleges provide a substantial resource across all eight curriculum⁴ areas, and will be able to help provide dedicated sector or specialist expertise or capacity to a region as required.

We also wish to emphasise to the Scottish Government the crucial role that colleges play in the senior phase, which should not be underestimated. Collaboration between colleges and schools is already taking place, however, the senior phase needs to reflect both academic and vocational routes to provide parity to young people – Foundation Apprenticeships is a good example of this.

We were pleased to see that the Glasgow City Region Education Improvement (GCREIC) Collaborative Draft Improvement Plan has committed to engaging with a number of additional stakeholders across the education sector including colleges. We believe this is a recognition that should be shared by all Regional Improvement Collaboratives across Scotland.

We also welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to undertake a review of the development of Regional Improvement Collaboratives in April 2018, with a further review taking place 12-18 months later. We acknowledge that this review process will be fundamental to the successful development of Regional Improvement Collaboratives – we are keen to contribute to this work to ensure that the college sector is represented during this process.

⁴ <https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/learning-in-scotland/curriculum-areas>

4. Professionalising the Workforce

Colleges Scotland acknowledges the provision to establish the Education Workforce Council for Scotland which will operate independently from Scottish Ministers rather than being an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government.

Aligned to that provision is the intention to register college lecturers and relevant support staff as a professional group within the education sector. Professional registration is welcomed, and such provision is fully supported by Colleges Scotland. We support the proposal that registration provisions will be staggered in order to allow appropriate time for planning and preparation for each professional group. We believe that a provision and requirement to professionally register our workforce will provide an opportunity to complement key ongoing activity in the college sector, specifically:

- National Bargaining for lecturers and support staff
- Review of professional standards for lecturers - currently being undertaken by the College Development Network.

A component part of national Agreements reached with lecturers incorporates a requirement for professional registration for this group from April 2019. As registration, and subsequent continuous professional development and professional standards will be at the forefront of the sectors' strategic organisational development in professionalising and developing our workforce. It is important that Colleges Scotland has a voice in relation to the governance structures established. This will also be particularly relevant as the college workforce is integral in driving the Scottish economy forward.

If there is a requirement to upskill sections of the workforce as part of a move towards new professional standards, colleges are well placed to undertake this activity.

5. Conclusion

As the representative body for the college sector, we look forward to further engaging with the Scottish Government in due course in relation to the provisions set out in the Education (Scotland) Bill as there are implications for Scotland's colleges, especially in relation to both Regional Improvement Collaboratives and professionalising the workforce.

Colleges Scotland
January 2018