

Colleges Scotland's Submission to the Education and Culture Committee on Education Scotland – Spending Decisions and Outcomes

Introduction

Colleges Scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit views on the spending decisions and outcomes delivered by Education Scotland.

The relationship between Education Scotland and Scotland's colleges is realised primarily through Education Scotland's college review process. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) contracts on an annual basis with Education Scotland through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Service Level Agreement (SLA) to perform quality reviews of colleges and to report on particular aspects of college provision, such as the provision of support for learners.

Education Scotland operates a specialist team of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) who carry out annual engagement visits to colleges in a liaison and support role. They also lead teams of reviewers who report (in a four-year cycle) on the quality of provision for all colleges in the sector and monitor any required improvements.

Scotland's colleges are also responsible for the delivery of a fair proportion of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in the senior phase. This occurs through both school-college partnerships where school pupils attend college for elements of their chosen course that are not available in school, and national courses offered to those who have left school without sufficient qualifications. The first category includes programmes designed as part of the Scottish Government's [Developing the Young Workforce \(DYW\) Scotland's Youth Employment](#) strategy.

Our responses to the questions on each specific theme are answered in turn below.

1. How Education Scotland assesses:

➤ the uptake of the advice and support it provides

This is amalgamated into the annual engagement process and ensures that there is a good level of engagement between each colleges and its Education Scotland liaison HMI.

➤ the effectiveness of this advice and support in delivering improvement.

In the college sector, Education Scotland monitors how colleges respond to recommendations for improvement following the publication of a review report. At the end of each four-year cycle of reviews there is an evaluation by Education Scotland of the operation of the review process and its effectiveness in delivering improvement. This is carried out jointly with the SFC and provides a basis for modifications to the Quality Framework and the processes for the next cycle of reviews.

2. Education Scotland's relationship with schools and local authorities

We have indicated above that a proportion of CfE courses and qualifications are delivered in Scotland's colleges. However, the support provided by Education Scotland to those delivering CfE has been predominantly targeted at schools. For a considerable period of time the only way to access particular CfE support resources was through Glow, the national intranet for schools, which meant that college-based lecturers were unable to benefit from the Education Scotland advice and teaching materials.

3. How its inspection of schools delivers accountability.

The review of colleges on behalf of SFC holds colleges to account for the quality of their delivery and their capacity for quality improvement. This is carried out through the publication of a Quality Framework and a handbook for the conduct of college reviews. The SFC engages in strategic dialogue with colleges and uses the outcomes of review to inform these dialogues.

4. The extent to which it has helped to 'promote high-quality professional learning and leadership amongst education practitioners', and the challenges that remain.

For the college sector, this role is carried out by the College Development Network.

5. The risks and benefits of spreading its activity across a wide range of education settings.

There are clear benefits in engaging with education across the widest front. This allows for the identification and spread of good practice from one sector to another. It also allows a view to be taken of the totality of a learner's journey through the system – from early years to the transition to further and higher education and employment.

The risks are that the impacts that Education Scotland can make are diluted because the total resource available to Education Scotland is spread over a wider range of interests and activities.

6. How effectively it is addressing the principal risks listed in its annual accounts.

The principal risks currently faced by Education Scotland are:

Successful implementation of CfE

Over the life of this initiative there have been significant delays in the publication of key documents (such as Assessment). There have also been delays in the provision of teaching resources that exemplified the standards for CfE subjects, and in some areas revisions to previously published materials that have not been helpful to practitioners (e.g. science). Mention has already been made of the disadvantage to the college sector of Education Scotland's focus on the school experience and its use of Glow as a repository for support materials.

Successful transition of Education Scotland and Local Authority sites onto SWAN

No comment.

Successful implementation of Glow

Colleges have made significant investment in Virtual Learning Environments and other college systems that are more suited to post-school and adult learners. It is only after much negotiation that Glow has finally been made available to colleges, by which time it has become an irrelevance. In any case, most young people leaving school and entering college appear to have little interest in continuing with a system (Glow) that has delivered little for them in their school years.

Future budget reductions as part of an overall tightening on public sector funding

Care should be taken in any reductions that might jeopardise the success of the flagship CfE initiative.

Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff

No comment.

Ensuring that grants awarded contribute to Education Scotland's objectives

One grant of which Colleges Scotland is aware of is to New College Lanarkshire to produce a toolkit for reading for prison inmates. This contributed to Education Scotland's support for Community Learning and Development (CLD) activities.

Ensuring best use of resources through improved business planning and performance management

No comment.

Ensuring the Education Scotland IT system meets enhanced security and records management requirements

No comment.

Lack of clarity on the VAT treatment on non-Education Scotland staff who undertake inspections and develop guidance on the Scottish Curriculum.

The participation of college staff in review teams is an important aspect of capacity building in the sector, as well as contributing to the spread of good practice. Education Scotland and the SFC should ensure that any barriers to the continuation of this arrangement are identified and resolved.

Colleges Scotland

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