

## Colleges Scotland MSP Briefing

Ahead of the Scottish Government debate on 'Delivering a World Class Education System' scheduled for **Tuesday 12 January 2016**, Colleges Scotland wishes to highlight a number of issues that are pertinent to the sector. Colleges Scotland is the representative organisation for the college sector in Scotland.

Scotland's colleges:

- contribute positively to the delivery of sustainable vocational and higher education provision for the benefit of students in their career choices
- support Scottish Government priorities and contribute to Scotland as a nation, the economy, our communities and individuals
- widen access and achieve greater fairness and equality in the education sector
- deliver high quality education
- provide high value in return for the public investment in the sector. An independent [study](#) on the economic value of Scotland's colleges, looking at both the investment analysis and an economic impact analysis, showed that colleges reap £14.9 billion for the Scottish economy each year, representing 8.8 per cent of the total economic output of the nation.

### Providing High Quality Learning and Teaching

Scottish colleges continue to deliver high quality courses to meet the future needs of Scotland's young people, particularly those who are benefiting from the improvements resulting from the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence. The sector is taking a leading role in the implementation of the [Developing the Young Workforce – Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy](#) and is working with schools, universities and employers to ensure that young people have the necessary skills for the future. Success rates for students in both Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) have been steadily improved over the past five years. In 2013/14 the number of successful HE students was around five thousand more than in 2009/10. The number of successful college students progressing to university has also increased.

### Colleges as Vocational Hubs

Colleges have a key role to play in their partnership with schools to provide vocational education for young people of school age. Colleges use their extensive experience of working with employers in vocational sectors to prepare people for work and deliver skilled personnel to meet the needs of industry and support economic growth. This experience is being harnessed to position colleges as vocational hubs in their region, identifying and providing work-based experiences for young people as well as technical and vocational education. Colleges are key to the development and delivery of the new foundation apprenticeships across a range of sectors.

### Widening Access

Colleges are aware of the need to make available opportunities and arrangements for learning that are independent of socio-economic background or other factors that may lead to educational disadvantage. The [interim report](#) of the Commission for Widening Access identifies positive aspects of the work of colleges in overcoming disadvantage. It identifies the following success factors in overcoming barriers to access in colleges:

- the provision of high quality advice and careers guidance at all points in the student lifecycle
- clear pathways for progression through education to employment
- support for vulnerable young people at the points of transition
- easily accessed web-based provision of information about the college sector including its portfolio of provision and success stories.

## Funding Needs

Scotland's colleges are critical to the delivery of policy priorities, such as economic growth, widening access, reducing inequalities, fairness, Developing the Young Workforce and gender balance. Colleges Scotland sees the protected funding for the college sector in 2016/17 at current levels, announced as part of the Scottish draft budget on 16 December 2015, as a vote of confidence in the sector and a strong recognition of the valuable work that colleges deliver for the benefit of students, business and communities across Scotland.

Over the past few years, data analysed by Audit Scotland shows that around £69m has been lost from the sector as a result of funding reductions, along with a significant number of part time places and corresponding lecturing staff. Any additional funding provided could be used to help maintain capacity for part-time and adult learners, with the consequential benefit this brings from the upskilling and retraining parts of the workforce, including strengthening the economy. Any additional money would also contribute to increased delivery of the policy priorities mentioned in the paragraph above.

Adequate capital funding is required to ensure that colleges can offer their students high quality learning experiences in facilities that allow them to experience the conditions and use of equipment that constitute modern practice. In Colleges Scotland's spending review submission, we highlighted a capital need totalling £280m over the years 2016/17 to 2018/19. We also set out some innovative and imaginative ways in which colleges could help maximise the return on the public investment in education, skills and lifelong learning. We look forward to working closely and constructively with Scottish Government to take these forward.

## The Need for a Review of Student Support

The fixed amount of student support funding for further education received by the college sector has led to individual colleges managing the funds, within the rules, in response to localised pressures. Over the years, this has led to anomalies in student support funding across Scotland.

Colleges Scotland supports the implementation of a standard and fair system for student support funding, and supports further work exploring the feasibility and impacts of introducing an entitlement based system as one option for the standard and fair system.

There are risks associated with moving to an entitlement system, in particular, further work is required around continuation of a grant based system, the process for ensuring that the funds are not over-subscribed, the impact on students as currently an entitlement to bursary funding would count as income for means tested benefits and any future changes to the welfare system.

## National Bargaining

Progress continues to be made to reintroduce National Bargaining to the sector following an absence of over 20 years. The 2015/16 pay offer includes the living wage for all directly employed staff, 1% consolidated pay increase, or £300 for employees earning less than £30,000. This offer exceeds public sector pay policy and the support staff trade unions are currently recommending acceptance of this offer to their members. Unfortunately the EIS have rejected the reasonable pay offer.

2015/16 should be seen as a transitional year and it is therefore disappointing that the EIS have rejected the reasonable pay offer by conflating this with their claim for harmonisation. We recognise that discrepancies in pay and conditions do exist but these cannot be addressed overnight, and we will continue to work with the Trade Unions to reduce differentials in pay and conditions of service. We estimate that the additional funds required to standardise pay and conditions of service would be in the region of £35m.

**Colleges Scotland:** This briefing has been provided by Colleges Scotland for MSPs' information. More information can be found on [www.collegesscotland.ac.uk](http://www.collegesscotland.ac.uk).

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