

## Colleges Scotland – MSP Briefing

Ahead of the Scottish Government debate on *The Contributions of Colleges and Universities to Scotland's Success* scheduled for **Tuesday 14 June 2016**, Colleges Scotland wishes to provide you with some background information on the college sector in Scotland, and its contribution and impact on learners, society and the wider Scottish economy. Colleges Scotland is the representative organisation for all colleges in Scotland.

Scotland's colleges contribute to Scotland as a nation, the economy, our communities and individuals. They are uniquely positioned within communities to enable access to the acquisition and development of the skills and knowledge required for successful careers in work, delivered in a way that emphasises fairness and equality. Scotland's colleges deliver both Further Education (FE) provision and 20% of Higher Education (HE) provision throughout all of Scotland.

Colleges are contributing to Scotland's educational and economic success through:

- creating pathways to work, providing vocationally specific training and apprenticeships to deliver the skills needed by industry and commerce
- delivering high quality courses which enable students to secure future employment and gain skills for life
- supporting Scottish Government policy priorities such as economic growth, widening access, reducing inequalities, fairness, raising attainment, gender balance, Developing the Young Workforce, innovation and entrepreneurialism.
- widening access and achieve greater fairness and equality in the education sector
- delivering £14.9 billion for the Scottish economy each year<sup>1</sup>
- providing high value in return for the public investment in the sector – for every pound invested, there is a 6-fold return<sup>2</sup>.

### Skilled and Successful Learners

Fair access for young people, regardless of background and circumstances, is at the heart of what colleges stand for. Colleges are uniquely placed within communities to offer people new settings and valuable opportunities to learn – particularly if they have not been engaged at school. Colleges work in partnerships with schools, local authorities, universities and employers to provide opportunities for people to gain skills, improve employability or gain a higher education.

Colleges Scotland believes that it is in the interests of the students, the economy and the public purse that the learner journey is as effective and efficient as possible. This should mean that the interest of the learner is central, and that institutional barriers are removed from the journey, with schools, colleges and universities all playing their part. This should mean that:

- Learners must be given full recognition for their prior attainment as they progress between institutions without unnecessary repetition of any 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 systematic or institutional factors.
- All learners should have equal access to a consistent and coherent post-16 learning framework available nationally.
- Learner choices should be informed by comprehensive, objective and transparent advice and guidance.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.collegesscotland.ac.uk/Demonstrating-the-Economic-Value/demonstrating-the-economic-value-of-scotlands-colleges.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.collegesscotland.ac.uk/Demonstrating-the-Economic-Value/demonstrating-the-economic-value-of-scotlands-colleges.html>

An example of this is articulation. Articulation allows students to progress through the various stages of the educational landscape, whilst ensuring the removal of duplication. The 2+2 and 2+1 models are those in which the first two years of tertiary education are delivered locally at a college before students articulate to university, entering year 3 as standard, and then undertaking a further two years at the university to gain an honours degree (2+2 model) or a further single year at university to gain an ordinary degree (2+1 model).

### Student Support Funding

In addition, Colleges Scotland is of the view that nobody should be financially worse off by attending college than they would be on benefits and we fully support measures to improve student support to ensure that all students can attend college, regardless of their personal circumstances or background. The implementation of a standard and fair system for student support funding would provide students with adequate financial support, as well as reasonable certainty on the support they are likely to receive for the duration of their study.

### Widening Access

It is clear from the recent reports by UCAS<sup>3</sup> and the Sutton Trust<sup>4</sup>, that the means to most successfully widen access to higher education for those from the most deprived areas, is through the college sector.

## **Innovative and Sustainable Institutions**

### Sustainable Investment

The college sector believes that sustainable and evidenced based investment is critical to ensure that the vital educational activities of Scotland's colleges can continue and ideally expand to keep benefiting students and continue to support the wider Scottish economy.

Without sustainable investment, the opportunities available for the college sector to provide a suitable and appropriate learning experience for students, and contribute to a wide range of key Scottish Government priorities, will be lost.

As public bodies, colleges are in a relatively unique situation where the public funding received does not cover the costs of the activity generated. All colleges need to generate differing levels of additional income to allow delivery of teaching and learning, with, on average across Scotland, colleges required to generate approximately 30% of income from sources other than public money allocated through the Scottish Funding Council, simply to allow provision of day-to-day college activity, or to cultivate innovative business opportunities both at home and internationally.

### Impact of Office for National Statistics (ONS) Reclassification

Colleges have been reclassified by the ONS as public bodies and are subject to central Scottish Government accounting rules. This means that colleges can no longer hold reserves, nor borrow, which seriously curtails their ability to plan strategically over a timescale longer than a year.

### Innovation

Increasing levels of business innovation is a priority identified in the Scottish Government's Economic Strategy and Programme for Government, and we believe that Scotland's colleges 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.

Innovation for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) is focused on skills innovation, for the benefit of the SME and the wider economy. The effective working relationships and knowledge between colleges and SMEs within a region means that colleges are ideally placed to support SMEs in relation to innovation, including acting in partnership with universities and innovation centres.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/ucas-publishes-first-equality-reports-individual-universities>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Access-in-Scotland\\_May2016.pdf](http://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Access-in-Scotland_May2016.pdf)

## **A Stronger Economy and Fairer Society**

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 to society. They also 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 also promote fairness, helping those furthest away from the labour market to move towards employment and supports those with few or no qualifications to achieve a better education. The learning provision offered by colleges enables individuals and families to get out of poverty, and increases a person's life chances.

## **National Bargaining**

National Bargaining has been reintroduced to the sector following an absence of over 20 years, in line with Scottish Government policy. As part of the reintroduction of National Bargaining, Colleges Scotland, as the Employers' Association, and the trade unions are working towards agreement on the implementation of a new contract and national pay scales. We are seeking to ensure that we have a workforce able to meet the needs of the future. All of this requires a considerable change programme, and there will need to be a significant resource input from Scottish Government.

**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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