

Submission to the European and External
Relations Committee Call for Evidence –
Scotland's relationship with the EU

5 September 2016

Colleges Scotland Submission to the European and External Relations Committee Call for Evidence – Scotland’s relationship with the EU

Colleges Scotland is the voice of the colleges in Scotland and supports the sector by ensuring that its views are heard and interests represented. We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee on this call for evidence.

Scotland’s colleges attract talent and develop projects from across the globe and we want to maintain our work with our European partners at all levels. It is important that we now work closely with both the Scottish and UK Governments to assist in developing appropriate systems that enable our staff, students and projects to continue to flourish and excel in the new landscape following the EU referendum.

This submission provides an initial overview of the most significant ways in which colleges relate to the European Union (EU) and the other EU countries. Since the UK has been part of the EU for over forty years, the relationships and impacts are both deep and extensive, therefore considerable work will be required to ensure the unpicking of these relationships is done in the most efficient and sensitive way.

This submission is divided into the following sections:

- Income from the European Union
- Students from other European countries
- Staff in colleges.
- Current major European-funded projects

It is important that the potential impacts to the college sector are monitored and Colleges Scotland is keen to continue to work closely with the Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council and other key stakeholders.

Income from European Union

Colleges in Scotland receive European funding which helps to deliver high quality courses that benefit students, society and the economy. There are two main college projects which are significantly funded by the EU and which make up the bulk of college income derived from the EU:

- Developing Scotland’s Workforce (DSW), within which there is transitional funding for the Highlands and Islands; and
- Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

£m	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
YEI	8.7	9.3	9.9
DSW	2.9	4.3	5.2
Total	11.6	13.6	15.1
SFC match funding	8.4	10.1	11.3

The funding provides additional student places of around 63,000 credits (4,200 FTE students). YEI is significant for Glasgow (around £4.1m) and Lanarkshire (around £3.0m).

Students from other European Union Countries

The number of students attending colleges who are from other EU countries are shown below, which can be significant for particular colleges.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
FTEs	234	240	131

The Status of, and Tuition Fees for, Students from Other EU Countries

The most immediate and significant issue is uncertainty over the status of students from other European countries who are studying, or due to commence their studies in the autumn.

In relation to students currently in the system, until the UK leaves the EU, it is our understanding that EU students can rely on current arrangements. Therefore, students entering their final year of studies in 2016-17 should be able to complete their studies with their current fee status.

There is greater uncertainty surrounding those who have yet to take up the offer of a place, or who are in the early years of their studies at college. As the impact is not known as yet, and will no doubt be subject of the Brexit negotiation discussions, this uncertainty is likely to impact on college students attending colleges in Scotland.

There would be merit in considering the case that all current students have 'acquired' rights before the termination of the treaty. Also, when taking account of the framework for the UK's future relationship with the EU, the EU/European Parliament may seek to specify that any EU-students already enrolled at the time of the UK's departure from the EU would be covered by some form of transitional arrangements that would mean they could complete their course on the same basis in terms of fees as when they first enrolled.

Furthermore, a new relationship between the UK and the EU might include membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) with a requirement for free movement and therefore fee status could be protected.

Staff in Colleges

Colleges have benefitted from freedom of movement as a result of membership of the EU. Participation in EU Framework Programmes has enriched the talent pool for staff, where ease of travel has meant opportunities for UK staff.

Consideration should be given to providing new and additional safeguards to protect a withdrawal of EU talent from the UK, including a similar exemption for other skilled educators and highly-skilled staff.

Current Major European-funded Projects

Erasmus

1,600 Scots go abroad to European countries with Erasmus every year. Erasmus is an EU student exchange programme and the single largest source of funding for Scottish/UK students wanting to study or work abroad.

Numbers of Scottish students taking up opportunities for outward mobility through Erasmus are going up. They have increased by 50% over the last 7 years. The opportunity for student exchange within Europe enriches the learning experience, enhances employability and promotes greater understanding and respect of different people and cultures.

Colleges Scotland considers the Erasmus programme as extremely beneficial and that it would be a considerable loss if some equivalent arrangements are not introduced as the UK leaves the EU. Consideration should be given to whether any negotiated settlement would, like Norway's for example, allow continued participation in programmes like Erasmus for our students to be able to study abroad, and to facilitate EU students to continue to study in the UK.

Capital Projects

The Scottish Government, through the capital funding programme arrangements administered by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) over the last 10 years or so, has invested approximately £500m in the college sector towards a total of about £1bn. Typically such funding for a college capital project would be about 20-25%, but considerably higher in the more deprived areas like Lanarkshire and Glasgow. So a conservative estimate would be approximately £200-250m of European funding has been provided towards historic capital projects.

Colleges Scotland
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