



## **MSP Briefing: Education and Skills Committee Debate**

Ahead of the Education and Skills Committee debate on Thursday 12 January 2017 on SQA, Education Scotland, SFC and SDS – Performance and Role, Colleges Scotland wishes to provide you with an overview of the key points for the college sector.

### **Shared Vision and Strong Leadership at National Level**

Colleges Scotland believes that there would be great benefit in more coherent and consistent strategies across skills, education, careers advice and employability in Scotland. In our [response](#) to the call for evidence on the Enterprise and Skills Review, we suggested the creation of an Enterprise and Skills Board for Scotland. We are pleased to see that the creation of a new Scotland-wide statutory board is one of the key recommendations of the Phase One report although we wish to make it clear that we did not envisage the abolition of individual agency boards. Indeed, we suggested that this statutory board should be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Education, and included amongst its membership chairs of the agencies and representatives from colleges, universities, business and local government.

### **Review of the Learning and Skills Journey**

Colleges Scotland has been calling for a review of the learning and skills journey so we welcome the recommendation in the Enterprise and Skills Review's Phase 1 for a review of the learner journey. Colleges Scotland recently [published](#) the college sector's vision for a new coherent and equitable learning framework for those aged 16 and over. This would also address potential productivity gains that could be achieved across the education sector as a whole by having a more joined up, seamless and efficient learner journey, and one which places the individual learner at the centre. The college sector is keen to fully contribute to any review of the learner journey.

### **Responsiveness to Regional Challenges**

The Phase 1 report of the Enterprise and Skills Review recognises the growing role of regional colleges as education hubs, focused on the needs of each region's learners and employers. Colleges Scotland's submission to the review, proposed that colleges should act as Regional Skills Hubs. There is an opportunity to develop a collaborative leadership model, where a common approach and consistent policy implementation is seen between key stakeholders who support and deliver across the education and skills landscape. If a 'Regional Skills Hub' model was adopted that encompasses schools, colleges, universities, local authorities, SDS, employers and Community Planning Partnership, this could provide the much needed joined up approach within which to operate.

Stronger links between these bodies will clearly assist with the development of a functional skills pipeline which creates more vocational pathways for learners and the right skills for local businesses. Colleges are uniquely placed to fulfil this kind of "hub" role and their involvement could be managed through the Regional Outcome Agreement process which, with more regional autonomy, would bring direct benefits to businesses. Colleges would combine the work they already deliver for local businesses to address the demand for apprenticeships within a region and assess the need for training and providing upskilling. Colleges Scotland is also pleased to play its part in the development of the new £10m Flexible Working Development Fund, announced by the Scottish Government in December 2016, to support in-work training.

## **Supporting Innovation and Entrepreneurship**

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 is a priority identified in the Scottish Government's *Economic Strategy* and Programme for Government.

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. To aid this relationship and maximise the benefit within the new regional landscape, colleges are looking afresh at developing the capacity for regional engagement to:

- work with universities and innovation centres
- support innovation
- roll out business incubator space
- ensure access to resource to aid start-up of ventures.

## **Simplifying the Policy and Funding Regime**

A key outcome of the Enterprise and Skills Review should be to rationalise and simplify the policy and funding regime that is focused on delivering results that directly contribute to our shared vision, which in turn provides improved opportunities for our economy.

In order to achieve this collective vision, we consider it necessary that each of the individual agencies make decisions that support and align to the collaborative approach that seeks to bring a more coherent joined up strategy for the economy, education, skills and employability.

In general, to achieve this we require the following:

- Stronger and more focused co-ordination across the public sector agencies and a decluttering of the organisational-led policies, interventions, funding methodologies and accountability regimes that currently exist.
- Much greater emphasis on innovation and internationalisation which encourages and rewards entrepreneurship and enterprise and seeks to mainstream 'what works best' in a more deliberate, timely and agile way.
- Improved recognition of the fundamental importance of skills in delivering a step change in productivity, equality and well-being and the development of a single system approach to achieving that end.
- Better recognition of the national and regional dynamic and a more flexible policy and funding environment that is based on what works best, with much greater emphasis on sharing best practice and intelligence across organisational and regional boundaries to make a real difference.

At present colleges receive funding from multiple sources which operate based on different policies, funding methodologies and accountability regimes. Colleges Scotland would like to see this streamlined and simplified.

## **Working Internationally**

The Phase 1 report of the Enterprise and Skills Review recognises the importance of working internationally to deliver maximum benefit for Scotland. Colleges in Scotland have a history of attracting staff and students from around the world and leading on key overseas projects, and we want to maintain this work and relationships.