

Net-Zero, Energy and Transport Committee – Colleges Scotland Survey Response – January 2022

Introduction

Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests and ensuring that colleges are at the heart of a world class education sector that is recognised, valued and available to all. Colleges Scotland, as the membership body, represents all 26 colleges in Scotland, which deliver both further education and around 24% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

The colleges sector [Statement of Commitment on the Climate Emergency](#), as published in February 2021, commits the sector to being ‘a key partner in delivering Scotland’s inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth’, and colleges have been liaising with the SFC and outlining their plans for further carbon reductions. Since the launch of the Climate Commission for UK Higher and Further Education, Colleges Scotland has represented the college sector in Scotland in discussions and been involved in the development of an action plan by College Development Network in response to the UK government’s stated climate emergency.

Key Points

College Sector Infrastructure (ICT and Estates)

The Scottish Government Programme for Government announcement in September 2021 included a commitment to ask the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to develop a college infrastructure strategy.

From discussions with the SFC, there is a shared commitment to co-creating the infrastructure strategy document with the college sector, with initial discussions set to focus on what the college sector wants to achieve, how we would co-create it and timescales, alongside data needs and exploring capital funding routes.

Investment in college sector infrastructure from the Scottish Government will not only help deliver positive outcomes in terms of providing college estates suitable for the delivery of learning and teaching, but also bring wider benefits around upskilling and reskilling and assisting in achieving the outcomes of the National Performance Framework. This investment would also create further opportunities for the college sector to play its part in the Scottish Government’s plan to transition to net zero emissions and environmental sustainability.

On this basis the Colleges Scotland Spending Review submission made the ask of Scottish Government to commit to £92m of capital investments, consisting of backlog capital maintenance and lifecycle maintenance, as well as funding for digital maintenance, to enable the sector to meet the current requirements in this space.

The Climate Emergency and Sector Targets

The need for colleges to reduce emissions by 2045 in their capacity as public sector bodies, under the terms of The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019, has been a

significant topic of discussions in relation to the Infrastructure Investment Group, as convened by Colleges Scotland.

The sector is keen to take forward a co-productive approach, working collaboratively with the Scottish Government, Scottish Funding Council and other leading bodies such as the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and Scottish Futures Trust, to utilise expertise from within Government to support the sector – to develop early buy-in for developing plans.

Colleges as Green Civic Anchors

Scotland's economy has already been significantly impacted because of Covid-19 and colleges, in their role as local civic anchors across the country, will be pivotal in driving economic recovery with their agility and ability to upskill and retrain people, providing them with the employability skills employers need.

Colleges are ideally placed to support organisations across Scotland to rebuild businesses and their confidence and to do this with the net zero targets in mind, whilst creating opportunities to develop resource efficient, inclusive and sustainable economic approaches, which help address inequality and poverty, in line with the goals of the Commission.

Given the college sector's extensive networks and unique reach to SMEs, colleges have a key role to play in supporting net-zero related innovation activity in these businesses, whilst driving regional economic developments and recoveries focused around moving towards a net zero economy and simultaneously maximising the opportunities for workers to develop their skills as part of these changes.

By acting as green civic anchors across Scotland, colleges are in a unique position in being role model organisations, by demonstrating to their communities, students and employers how sustainable buildings and supporting infrastructure can be used to achieve Net Zero. Some colleges for example are openly considering to acting as 'living labs' of sustainable practice so everyone engaged with the college experiences the best sustainable practices.

Role of Colleges in Supporting Just Transition and Net-Zero

The college sector is aware of the establishment of a new Just Transition Commission for the duration of this parliamentary term, reporting annually on the progress Scotland is making against the recommendations.

Going forward colleges across Scotland will continue to help Scottish workers, and Scottish apprentices, to keep pace with technological, environmental and labour market changes and to increase workforce and business resilience to future disruption as the economy both recovers from the impact of Covid-19 and transitions to a net-zero, low-carbon inclusive format in response to the Climate Emergency.

For example, in relation to skills, the biggest impact on reducing carbon emissions in housing will be through retrofitting. Colleges are the leaders in providing construction skills and with investment from the Scottish Government will be in a prime position to support the construction sector to adopt new practices.

As the Scottish Government takes forward the recommendations the knowledge and thinking of the college sector, a sector which is increasingly supporting both the development of an inclusive, cohesive and resilient economy across Scotland, should be utilised. Colleges can play a crucial role in planning, investing and implementing a transition to environmentally and socially sustainable jobs, sectors and economies, and in building on Scotland's economic and workforce strengths and potential.

Energy Skills Partnership (ESP)

ESP, established in 2011, is a collaboration of Scotland's colleges and industry partners established to increase Scotland's capability and capacity to deliver the right skills for the construction, energy, engineering and STEM sectors to meet industry demand against emerging skills priorities. As the college sector agency for energy, engineering and construction ESP operate a cohesive partnership across Scotland's colleges to demonstrate a responsiveness and collective capability to provide the skills required by industry, working with government agencies in doing so.

Colleges Scotland
January 2022