

National Planning Framework: Position Statement - Colleges Scotland Comments

February 2021

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 26% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

We welcome the opportunity to provide comment on behalf of the college sector in Scotland in relation to the Position Statement, and to inform the Scottish Government's current thinking on the issues that will need to be addressed ahead of the preparation of Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) as well as around the potential changes to national planning policies that the Scottish Government may be considering.

Key Points

Net Zero Emissions

We would agree with the rationale laid out by the Scottish Government on planning for net-zero emissions in the National Planning Framework Position Statement, especially with regards to ensuring the recommendations of the Just Transition Commission will inform the actions of the Scottish Government in this context.

As noted in our submission to the Just Transition Commission during its call for evidence, 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 recovers from the impact of Covid-19.

In doing so the college sector will also support the transition to a net-zero, low-carbon inclusive economy in response to the Climate Emergency, and take forward actions in line with the aims of the [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan](#). This activity will also support the ambitions covered in the Position Statement around ensuring that our buildings will be more energy efficient and designed to be sustainable. Investment in the college infrastructure from the Scottish Government will not only help deliver positive outcomes in this context, but also bring wider benefits around upskilling and reskilling and assisting in achieving the outcomes of the National Planning Framework.

On that basis we would remind Scottish Government that 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 upskilling and reskilling opportunities for workers to develop their skills as part of these changes.

Resilient Communities

As with net-zero emissions we would also agree with the current position of Scottish Government in relation to planning for resilient communities, and we note the emphasis on focusing on people and the quality of areas and where they live, in addition to the focus on developing more sustainable communities through the promotion of inclusion and equality.

In doing so we would again raise the key role of the college sector in Scotland in supporting this theme as proposed in the Position Statement. As has been stated in the [Cumberford-Little Report](#), colleges are 'anchor institutions' at the heart of the communities they serve, and it will be through the continued efforts of staff, students and stakeholders from every college community around Scotland that the necessary support, opportunities and end results will come. Despite the uncertainty created by COVID-19 there remains a social contract between colleges and the communities they serve, as well as a shared vision of the positive outcomes that can be delivered through community partnership.

In this role as anchor institutions, particularly in areas of significant multiple deprivation, colleges have encountered a number of broad themes around poverty and inequality which emerged more prominently as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis. In turn this has led to the development of a range of potential responses going forward for the post-COVID and phased return period.

The college sector has an important role to play in the months ahead, as the Scottish Government and partner agencies look to implement programmes and initiatives to deal with the ramifications of COVID-19 that require direct delivery and intervention by colleges. This will involve colleges leading on youth education and employment options, employee reskilling and upskilling, and short-term training initiatives for those who are unemployed.

In doing so colleges will provide those learner pathways that we know will be crucial to improving individual life chances, and the resilience of communities. This activity can be directly aligned in support of the theme of Resilient Communities and in promoting inclusion.

A Wellbeing Economy

On the basis of the themes and issues covered in the Position Statement we would agree with the current Scottish Government position in relation to planning for a wellbeing economy.

We welcome the focus on creating healthier, fairer and more prosperous places and ensure future development contributes to a green, sustainable, and inclusive economic recovery, as well as the emphasis on taking a flexible and enabling approach to future business and employment uses.

The college sector will be vital, as it has been in supporting previous economic downturns, in unlocking sustainable and inclusive place-based and regional economies - continued investment in colleges across Scotland will deliver more resilient and sustainable local and regional communities. Following the regionalisation of colleges in 2013 the sector has had a key role in supporting City Region Growth Deals and Regional Economic Partnerships, so this investment will go a long way to building on that work, while supporting the development of wellbeing economies on a local and regional basis.

On this basis we would advise the Scottish Government that the sector is well placed in supporting the development of a Wellbeing Economy, and in supporting development in the parts of Scotland where quality jobs and investment are most needed, as set out in the Position Statement.

To help support the ambition of the Wellbeing Economy, we would strongly recommend that there is enhanced recognition of the role of colleges in supporting the skills-led recovery and the rapid retraining that will be required to support those individuals impacted by the economic impact of COVID-19 on business and employers across Scotland, and in doing so delivering against the outcomes established in the National Performance Framework.

Better, Greener Places.

We would agree with the direction of travel being taken in relation to this theme.

As set out in the position statement, a significant element of the college sector is based in rural areas. Colleges play a key role in supporting rural development and in encouraging development that helps to repopulate, sustain rural areas and stimulate rural economic growth.

As established in the [Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland](#), currently being taken forward by Skills Development Scotland: “colleges have a key role to play in developing a highly educated and skilled workforce, providing a broad base of education, vocational and work based learning opportunities” whilst leavers from rural based colleges are more likely to move straight into work than the national average.

Conclusion

The college sector has responded exceptionally well to the COVID-19 crisis and colleges will continue to act as civic anchors at the heart of our communities, putting learners at the centre of decision making and the Scottish economy and in doing so will be key to a swift recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, and in supporting the attainment of the National Outcomes as established in the National Performance Framework.

Colleges across Scotland will help to create a more successful country, give opportunities to all people living in Scotland, increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland, support the creation of sustainable and inclusive growth whilst reducing inequalities and giving equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress.

As the Scottish Government receives responses with which to inform and shape the National Planning Framework Position Statement, we expect that the knowledge and thinking of the college sector - a sector which is increasingly supporting both the development of an inclusive, cohesive and resilient society across Scotland - is taken into consideration in the next stages of the work of the Scottish Government. On this basis we would welcome the opportunity to further discuss the points made in this response at an appropriate time with the Minister.

Colleges Scotland
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