

National Discussion – College Sector Input and Call to Action - December 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.

This submission sets out the key elements about the role that colleges play in the education landscape, and some specific Calls to Action for Scottish Government and other key stakeholders that the college sector considers necessary at this time.

Key Role of the College Sector

When Colleges Thrive, Scotland Thrives

The college sector is a vital part of the educational landscape in Scotland. Delivering over 69 million hours of learning to more than 213,000 learners in 2020/21. Colleges are agile and responsive to the requirements of learners and industry, providing the high quality technical skilled workforce required, developing pathways for learners of all abilities and remaining adaptable and operating during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the most vulnerable learners benefit hugely from the support provided at college.

Key messages for the National Discussion include:

- The current work on the ‘Post-school education, research and skills: interim purpose and principles’, published on Friday 9 December 2022, must tie in with the work of the National Discussion.
- A coherent ecosystem must be defined from the collective outputs of the several Reviews currently underway.
- The opportunity must be taken to ensure a seamless learner journey involving schools, colleges and universities.
- Recognition of the colleges as national assets, that the Scottish Government already fund, is important.
- Colleges support key Scottish Government priorities around transformation of the economy of Scotland, alleviating poverty and tackling climate change.
- The importance of maximising the linkages to allow colleges to provide their key support for all of the Pillars set out in the National Strategy for Economic transformation (NSET).

School – College Partnership

A strong college sector is required to help deliver alongside the school sector for the cohort of learners up to 18 year old and to strengthen cohesion across the educational landscape. This will allow a better understanding of all parts of the ecosystem and for partnership working to deliver better learner outcomes as a priority, deliver better social mobility and significant gains for the three priorities identified by the Scottish Government:

- to secure a stronger, fairer, greener economy, in line with the National Strategy for Economic Transformation
- to support progress towards meeting child poverty targets
- to address climate change.

Lack of investment and support for colleges will harm the chances of Scotland's children and families, create the conditions where addressing climate change becomes very challenging if the workforce is not in place, and damages learners of all ages in delivering a fairer, greener economy.

A clear vision for the college sector will allow the college sector to help the Scottish Government deliver its agenda by continuing to:

- support the National Outcomes of the National Performance Framework
- deliver on the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)
- be the key provider of the skilled workforce
- supporting the Just Transition to Net Zero and dealing with the skills emergencies
- develop partnerships with industry, Innovation Centres, schools and community stakeholders
- be recognised as civic anchors within their place and communities
- address the poverty-related attainment gap
- provide life long learning opportunities and work based learning
- allow colleges to be committed to Fair Work and to building equality.

Colleges Supporting the Economy

Colleges are the powerhouses of Scotland's economy. Our skilled graduates contribute billions to Scotland's economy each year, across hugely diverse industries, in every community. Investment will deliver significant gains for Scotland as a nation, and allow colleges to support students at every stage of their learning journey, as new qualifications, upskilling, re-training, or as part of their school experience.

Colleges Scotland recognises the economic position of Scotland and the UK as the aftereffects of the Covid-19 pandemic, turbulent macro-economic conditions with high inflation, and now a cost of living crisis, all requiring a new approach to Scotland's economy. The Scottish Government has published the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) in response to this situation.

Colleges will continue to provide the vital contribution to ensure successful delivery of the five pillars of NSET. Colleges are the place where the necessary **workforce will be skilled up** and this generation and the next are supported into careers, by joining the workforce or continuing their education. Colleges are characterised by an ambition for greater collaboration across the skills and learning landscape, between schools, colleges, universities, and other providers, and outwards with employers, businesses and industry sectors. As civic anchors, the 26 colleges in Scotland play a vital role in the social and community make up of our places, **leading to a fairer and more equal society.**

Scotland's 26 colleges provide education and skills training to 213,000 students each year, in a mix of full time, part time, in person and remote learning, as well as delivery in partnerships with schools, employers and others. Around 44% of learners have an industry link as part of their course. This allows colleges to contribute to **productive businesses and regions**, and to support **entrepreneurial people and culture.**

Scotland's colleges are the best place for the seeds of recovery to take hold and flourish, with a **recognised culture of delivery** and already holding the expertise and ability to deliver reskilling, upskilling, career improvement and holistic support to people locally and regionally, across the country, ready to take advantage of the emerging **new market opportunities.**

Impacts on Poverty

Pathways from Poverty Report

On Wednesday 2 March 2022, College Development Network (CDN) and Colleges Scotland, through CDN's Research and Enhancement Centre published new report Pathways from Poverty: Current Challenges and the Role of Colleges, highlighting the crucial role that Scotland's colleges play in tackling poverty and in creating a more inclusive society.

The report highlights the vital position of colleges as anchor institutions in local communities, providing a focal point not just for course education but community engagement and action in relation to poverty.

The report shows that Scotland's 26 colleges each played a crucial part in the nation's pandemic response – providing students with digital devices, access to learning spaces for vulnerable students, and additional student support funding throughout the pandemic. The report draws attention to the need for colleges to continue their support for students at a time when the cost-of-living crisis and generational poverty continue to harm the chances of students reaching their full potential.

Cost-of-living Crisis

Amidst the cost-of-living crisis, it is clearer than ever before that colleges, as community anchors, are more than places of learning.

Some recent case studies include:

- Ayrshire College took forward a Connecting Communities approach to encourage engagement in health and wellbeing activities and promote positive mental health. This evidenced significant food poverty within the local community, with the college responding to oversee access to basic food provision.
- Borders College established a Young Talent programme to engage with those young people facing additional disadvantages in making the transition from to college from school, and helping them to develop resilience and overcome barriers relating to food poverty to enable them to fully engage in their learning.
- Forth Valley College identified particular challenges for their care experienced students, with this cohort experiencing disproportionate levels of poverty, In response, the college developed a Time4Me initiative to provide one-to-one mentoring for these students to improve their educational outcomes and experiences.
- Glasgow Kelvin College engaged in the STAY programme to support care experienced students to ensure they remained in college and that their education is not disrupted by poverty-related issues. Due to the success of this initial approach in supporting care experienced learners, the STAY programme has now been expanded to engage with all vulnerable students.

The college sector has the ability to drive and facilitate actions and interventions to create safe spaces and support learners. Colleges, working in partnership as part of multi-agency approaches, are actively mitigating the impact of poverty in all of its forms on students and communities and creating far reaching opportunities for students.

For young people, college is the most popular destination for those from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds – 38% of school leavers from SMID20 move into further education – compared to a figure of 28% of school leavers overall. There has to be a college place waiting for them when they make that choice. Colleges also provide that effective pathway for adults to give them a route to a brighter future out of poverty and gain a qualification which can increase their household income. Through supporting transitions for students and developing sustainable pathways for individuals out of poverty, colleges are delivering on the Scottish Government pledge to facilitate 'material improvements in the lives and wellbeing of families across Scotland'.

Mental Health and Well Being

In regard to the Mental Health and Well Being challenges now facing Scotland, and learners in particular, colleges need the resources both in finance and systems that will be able to support the most vulnerable in society.

The recently published Thriving Learners report on the college sector highlighted the challenges faced by learners, including:

- A collective 54% reported either Moderate, Moderately Severe or Severe symptoms of depression compared with 45% reporting None to Mild symptoms.
- Over half (55%) reported concealing a mental health problem for fear of stigmatisation and a further 1 in 10 (11%) were not sure if they had concealed a mental health problem for fear of stigmatisation.
- Nearly 4 in 10 (37%) reported having a current mental health diagnosis and 1 in 12 (8%) were unsure whether they had a diagnosis.
- 4 in 10 (40%) reported that they had experienced a serious psychological issue that they felt needed professional help.

Addressing Climate Change

The college sector is vital to allow Scottish Government to meet its commitments to tackle the climate emergency. The high end technical skills required by the workforce to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to deliver the green economic potential for Scotland, will be predominately provided through the college sector. The Energy Skills Partnership (ESP) is working with the sector to maximise the opportunities.

Going forward colleges across Scotland will also continue to help Scottish workers, and Scottish apprentices, to keep pace with technological, environmental and labour market changes, to increase workforce and business resilience to future disruption and deliver transitions to a net-zero, low-carbon inclusive format in response to the Climate Emergency.

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.

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.

School – College Partnerships

A key report by CDN entitled Co-Creating the Learner Journey: School – College Partnerships and Effective Skills Pathways was published in September 2021, and highlighted the importance of School – College Partnerships for both the individual learners and the economy.

The report defined a School – College Partnership as any learning activity that involves young people aged 3-18 that is delivered by a College in collaboration with a School, either in School or in College, with a broad focus on skills for life and work and often with the involvement of employers.

The research discovered that a fifth of Senior Phase pupils are involved in a School-College Partnership. Between 2016-17 and 2019-20 School-College Partnership enrolments rose steadily from 53,000 to almost 73,000.

On current upward trends, following recovery from Covid-19, would see an estimated 12% of all school pupils in Scotland engaging in study with a College.

One of the important findings of the report, aside from the nine recommendations, for the purposes of this National Discussion, is identifying the key characteristics and success factors of School – College Partnerships. These are:

- Learner-Centred, personalised approach.
- Shared vision, values and aims.
- Evidence-based.
- Inclusive.
- Local authority engagement.
- Collaborative and constructive relationships.
- Strong leadership.
- Industry as partners.
- Appreciation of different learning contexts.
- Continually evolving and improving.

The Value of Place

Colleges themselves are anchor institutions within Scotland’s communities and are a resilient partner for the various stakeholders around us, as well as a safe and warm learning space.

Colleges provide the practical training to equip the workforce of the future, required to drive the economic transformation required, with up to date and necessary skills.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown highlighted the importance of a physical location for learners of technical, professional and vocational courses run by colleges. Place also assists in providing the appropriate culture and social learning environment required by learners.

Call to Action points

Vision

There is a need for a collective vision across both Tertiary education providers and the wider educational landscape. It is vital that discussions are education wide, rather than just the college sector, and that we have commitment to systems thinking across all partners. It is vital that the outputs from the various different Reviews underway at this time form a consistent approach to help support the solutions required, and which collectively form a cohesive educational ecosystem going forward.

Structural Review

There is a need for a structural review involving all stakeholders to consider elements such as:

- Look at design of the delivery model for college teaching, including full time courses and more support needed to deliver part-time learning.
- Avoiding unnecessary duplication across the educational landscape, with a requirement to consider the whole educational landscape, which includes School – College Partnerships and Tertiary system. Colleges to be positioned to be the link between schools and universities to ensure readiness of pupils to move on at the earliest appropriate opportunity for an individual learner.
- Review process and timescales for apprenticeships, including funding routes.
- Stronger collaboration with partner agencies and stakeholders, including to embrace the opportunities offered by NSET, to deliver on Scottish Government policy and reduce system duplication.

School – College Partnerships

The importance of School – College Partnerships must be recognised, with delivery of all of the 10 key characteristics identified by the recent research being integrated into the structures across the educational landscape, in order to maximise the impact of this key relationship between different parts of the educational ecosystem. This can be explored as part of the Colleges Scotland Scottish Education Council Short Life Working Group on School – College Partnerships, which was agreed to be established at the Scottish Education Council in October 2022.

School – College Partnerships should also be used to deliver the Recommendations in the report (which were endorsed unanimously by the members of the Curriculum Advisory Board which advises Scottish Ministers), most notably seeing the role of these Partnerships as a key deliverer of reform, gaining further information at a regional level on activity and impact, as well as understanding how they can assist in delivering other Scottish Government policy areas.

Innovation

There is a requirement to recognise the role of colleges within the innovation landscape. Colleges are critical to supporting a green economic recovery with innovation, excellent education and teaching, skills training, and smart investments. In regard to innovation, investment will strengthen the role that colleges play in regional economies through process and management innovation, especially in regard to Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs). This would build on the successful utilisation of the previous College Innovation Fund and demonstration of what colleges can deliver.

Qualifications and Assessment

The evolution of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), with the creation of a new ‘Curriculum and Assessment’ agency presents an opportunity for a reset in the relationship between the national qualifications awarding body in Scotland and the distinct sectors it is designed to serve (i.e. schools and colleges).

Investment in the College Sector

Investment in the college sector is required to firstly stabilise and then bring sustainability for colleges. This is required to enable colleges to be able to contribute to Scottish Government priorities, deliver for learners and to have in place one of the key building blocks for a strong and stable economy.

Investment will ensure that the national public assets and skills, experience and abilities of the college sector can be utilised to help deliver on several of the National Outcomes. These include:

Education

We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society

Economy

We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy

Poverty

We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

Fair Work and Business

We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone

However, a lack of investment will harm the chances of Scotland’s children and families, and will result the significant problems in health and social care, in hospitality, in digital, and in tackling the climate emergency becoming even more challenging in the future if the skilled workforce is not in place. Inadequate resources will also damage learners of all ages, impact negatively the delivery of a fairer, greener economy, and reduce Scotland’s ability to innovate. In short, Scotland will miss out without an adequately resourced college sector. It will be harder for our country to thrive.

Equity of Funding

The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) information document produced for the Education and Young People Committee ahead of its evidence session on Wednesday 5 October 2022 set out the following information:

- Funding per full time equivalent student in 2022/23 for university - £7558
- Funding per full time equivalent student in 2022/23 for college - £5054
- Difference of £2504 per student

In addition, the parliamentary answer (S6W-01165 published on 28 July 2021) shows the stark differences in the baseline amounts invested in college students, and the real disparities across our educational settings. It should be noted that the figures in the parliamentary answer have not included tuition fees.

Extract from parliamentary answer:

Average expenditure per place for each education level in real terms (2020-21 prices)	
Education level	2019-20
Pre-school	£7,397
Primary School	£6,143
Secondary School	£8,278
College	£4,321
University	£5,913

Currently, college funding is to cover the teaching element, but colleges require additional resource to ensure a great student experience, equity of opportunity and to ensure the necessary support for those cohorts of students requiring additional interventions.

College students deserve parity of investment and Colleges Scotland has consistently called for stronger, longer-term funding to help colleges thrive.

What is required is the same level of funding for the same accredited level delivered.

Infrastructure

Separate investment is required for college estates, which are in a dire state of repair, with students learning in inequitable conditions compared to schools and universities, and to ensure adequate digital infrastructure is provided that will support the modern hybrid learning mode of delivery of learning. There is a need for renewal of Scotland's college estate and digital infrastructure as a key part of public sector assets, with hundreds of millions of pounds required to bring buildings up to wind and watertight conditions, with additional funding required to bring the estate upto net zero conditions.

The impacts and lost opportunity costs if there is no support and vision for the role of colleges

Without adequate support from Scottish Government for the college sector, to overcome the skills emergency, there are a number of significant risks. These include:

Impact on Learners

Individual learners would have a significantly reduced access to courses, leading to lost opportunity for those furthest from the labour market, and lost chance to gain skills and better themselves through education.

Impact on Communities

The geographical footprint and ability to be part of the fabric of communities would be reduced. There would be a loss of upskilling opportunities and the resultant skills pipeline loss would impact communities and the economy.

Risk of Job Losses

Based on the current funding envelope provided (flat cash going forward) and what are now looking like overly optimistic assumptions used on pay and inflation, colleges estimate 1,000 – 1,500 job losses from the sector over the next five years (from 2022/23 onwards).

Impact on the Scottish Economy

Significant risk of potential investment and opportunities, with Scotland not maximising its economic potential in areas such as green technologies.

The information below starts to set out the scale of just some of the potential technology opportunities that would be missed if adequate investment in the college sector to allow provision of the required high level technical skilled workforce is not delivered by Scottish Government.

- Offshore wind industry – projected investment requirements of **£6.3bn** per year between 2021 and 2035, totalling **£95bn**, is predicated on the requirement for 40,000 jobs over and above those for which there is current capacity. The majority of these roles would be supported by college programmes, and therefore without adequate investment in the college sector starting now, this investment potential is at significant risk, with huge losses to Scotland's economy and future potential in this work area. This is based on 30GW of output for offshore, with an additional 10GW planned for onshore wind generation.
- Hydrogen – Scottish Government itself has projected that the hydrogen economy could support between **10,000 – 40,000 jobs** by 2045, again with the majority at a skills level that would be supported through colleges.
- Transport infrastructure – it is projected that **£9bn** investment by 2026 is planned in Scotland, requiring over **25,000 skilled workforce** to replace those expected to retire or leave the industry in the next five years. The new workforce required will be on top of this amount.
- Energy Efficiency Low Carbon Heat - **£33bn** investment retired across Scotland's homes to meet Net Zero by 2045. By 2030, it's estimated that overall **28,000 jobs** could be created by the shift towards low carbon heating, with net additional jobs of 16,400.

In addition to the above, there are workforce requirements in carbon capture and storage, heat networks and Advanced Manufacture, as well as in existing job training requirements across energy, engineering and construction.

Colleges Scotland
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