

# Response to the Draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan (2024 – 2029) – Colleges Scotland Comment – April 2024

## 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. As the membership body, Colleges Scotland represents all 24 colleges, which deliver both further education and 13% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

The college sector's [Statement of Ambition](#) commits the sector to being 'a key partner in delivering Scotland's inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth', with colleges across Scotland having also signed up to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. 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 climate emergency. Colleges across Scotland have also been involved in the development and delivery of the Skills Development Scotland [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025](#).

Separate to this work, Energy Skills Partnership (ESP), the college sector membership body for energy, engineering and construction, which is a collaboration of Scotland's colleges and industry partners. It acts as a key strategic body in increasing 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 stemming from the Climate Emergency, Just Transition and move to Net-Zero.

On behalf of the college sector in Scotland we welcome the opportunity to provide our views regarding the Scottish Government's proposals for the Draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan (2024-2029). This response is structured using the main themes of the report.

## Key Points

The college sector is supportive of the Scottish Government's ambition within this Draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan. The five outcomes are closely aligned to much of the work done by Scotland's colleges, it is therefore concerning that colleges are only briefly mentioned within the whole document. For Scotland to adapt to the climate emergency it will be called upon to deliver a significant proportion of the training, upskilling, and reskilling of the workforce. Furthermore, as anchor institutions within their communities they are well placed to support Scotland's most disadvantaged people who will be disproportionately affected by climate change.

## Outcome Two: Communities

### Communities

The sector recognises the efforts to ensure benefits flow to communities, as established within the report, yet further engagement with colleges and recognition of the importance of their work is required. Acknowledgement of the vital work that colleges do within their regions and communities would enable further and substantial connection to local communities and their efforts to adapt to the climate emergency.

We would support the idea of a 'climate action hub', as this would be an effective way to make communities aware of how they can adapt to the changing climate. However, there needs to be more details given about which stakeholders and public bodies would be involved in forming these hubs. As anchor institutions within their communities, colleges would be well placed to support these hubs.

The college sector has the ability to drive and facilitate actions and interventions to create safe spaces. This can be seen through the work colleges are doing to mitigate the impact of poverty in all its forms by working in partnership as part of multi-agency approaches, creating far reaching opportunities for students.

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. As stated within this Adaptation Plan, those from disadvantage areas are more likely to be affected by climate change. The significant role of colleges to reach these learners should be acknowledged as their pathways can contribute towards building future climate resilience. This is the same for adult learners who can be given a route to a brighter future out of poverty and in line with the Adaption Plan can be given the knowledge necessary to mitigate the affects of climate change, and in more immediate terms increase their household income.

### **Outcome Three: Public Services and Infrastructure**

#### **College Sector Infrastructure**

As public sector institutions, colleges are required to decarbonise by 2038 and be net zero emissions by 2045. Significant and sustained investment into the college sector is required to meet these future targets, reshape and reduce the carbon footprint of institutions through refurbishments, reuse and collaborations across the education sector and business. The current state of public sector finances presents a major barrier to the ability of colleges to access funding to deliver on their climate targets, as well as adapt.

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 adapting to climate change, as well as aligning with the Scottish Government's plan to transition to net zero emissions.

### **Outcome Four: Economy, Business and Industry**

#### **Businesses**

Colleges are uniquely placed to support businesses and in particular SMEs across Scotland in their approach to developing climate resilience. They can do this whilst driving regional economic development and maximising the opportunities for learners, as well as those in work, to develop their skills as part of these changes. Furthermore, colleges can create learner pathways for those from the most deprived areas of Scotland which can also contribute towards adjusting to the effect of climate change.

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