

# College Sector Statement of Ambition 2021 – 2026



**When colleges thrive,  
Scotland thrives.**

**Colleges are supporting  
Scotland's economic recovery  
with climate-mitigating  
innovation, excellent education  
and teaching, skills training,  
and smart investments in  
people and places.**

**Colleges unlock the potential  
of **students** and **communities**.  
**Industry** gains and productivity  
increases through strong  
colleges. We make an impact  
beyond our walls.**

**When colleges thrive,  
Scotland thrives.**



## Supporting and innovating

Supporting a green economic recovery with innovation, excellent education and teaching, skills training, and smart investments.



## Supporting communities

Anchoring institutions in our communities and being resilient partners for the stakeholders around us.



## Supporting students

Fully supporting students to participate in education; delivering excellent education, teaching and skills training, available locally.

# WHEN COLLEGES THRIVE, SCOTLAND THRIVES.



## Supporting industry

The first-choice delivery partner for work-based skills and training.



## Supporting Scotland

Unlocking the untapped potential of a stronger and more empowered college sector.



# About Scotland's colleges

Across Scotland, colleges are equipping students from every background with the education and skills they need to achieve their ambitions and maximise their potential – enabling our country to thrive. Attending college is a positive choice for students to receive excellent learning, teaching and assessment; it is the destination for students with aspiration, turning potential into qualifications and delivering skills that last a lifetime. In turn, colleges are a great place to work, with routes to professional improvement and opportunities for development and promotion. Every college in Scotland has close links to industry and their local communities, with 26 colleges across 13 regions.

Colleges are inclusive and offer opportunities to everyone, building community wealth through education and training with a hugely diverse course offering. Nearly a third of college students come from Scotland's lowest socio-economic backgrounds, with a supported population of care experienced students. Fifteen per cent of students have a recorded disability and three quarters of those students are studying on mainstream programmes. Advancing social inclusion and delivering equality are a vital part of the impact colleges make.

Every year, almost a quarter of a million students benefit from a total of 70 million hours of teaching, with 19 in every 20 students who complete their studies going on to a job, training or continuing in education as positive destinations. Approximately a quarter of all higher education in Scotland is delivered by colleges.

**Our ambition**, following the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic, is to unlock the untapped potential of a more empowered college sector, making a strong and positive impact on lives, our environment, our economy and in our communities. Scotland's colleges can deliver excellence. By building even closer links with industry now and for the future, strengthening our role as anchor institutions in local communities and leveraging the energy and innovative spirit of the sector into success, colleges can deliver a game-changing amount of good for Scotland. Not only that, but the innovation and expertise held within Scotland's colleges community can – and should – be drawn upon more than ever before to address major issues facing society, most pressingly climate change, through joint research and collaboration with industry and government. Students are at the heart of everything colleges do and they are at the heart of our ambitions for the future. Colleges are organisations built around people – our students, our staff, our stakeholders, and our partners.

A lot has changed in a short period of time. This refreshed Statement of Ambition for 2021-2026 reflects these changes, incorporating too the contributions from a range of stakeholders to the college sector in the past two years, including: the College of The Future Report; The Report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery; the Scottish Funding Council Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability; and the Cumberland-Little Report, which strongly influence this Statement of Ambition.



# Supporting and innovating

**Our ambition is** that colleges will **support economic recovery with innovation,** excellent education and teaching, skills training and smart investments.

Emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, colleges will play a vital role in Scotland's education-led recovery and we will work to make an impact on every part of the system to help achieve economic stabilisation, community wealth building and growth.

## COLLEGES WILL MAKE AN IMPACT BY:

- Playing a vital part in Scotland's **Covid-19 recovery**. We will influence and advocate for the best learning and working experience at college, while adhering to public health guidelines and keeping people safe. We will be influential in the discussion about economic recovery, as providers of the skills and training that are required to revitalise Scotland's post-pandemic economy, and we will be active in promoting colleges as a solution to the many harms brought about by the pandemic. Colleges will repurpose the knowledge and expertise garnered in the pivot to digital learning – expertise will not be lost. Scotland's colleges will be a key partner by supporting inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Regional economies are key to achieving this ambition, and colleges as regional partners will be active and visible. Colleges will add to community wealth building and be strong contributors to wellbeing in our communities.
- Thriving in a system, not a hierarchy, and we will work with decision-makers on the need and opportunity to deliver a **coherent, flexible and integrated tertiary system** – in driving economic recovery we need a seamless skills system.
- Advocating for **fair funding** for institutions. Our ambition is to move to a simplified and streamlined funding landscape under new ways of working with the Scottish Funding Council. Our ambition is to reform the relationship between student headcount and qualifications. We will highlight the need for flexibility across the system.
- Capitalising on the sector's **Digital Ambition**, which has the potential to transform future college estate requirements as well as bringing innovation and creativity to teaching, learning and vocational study. Colleges will continue to be leaders in the national conversation on digital transformation – with a very sharp focus on ensuring students across Scotland can reap the benefits no matter their location or rurality – working strategically and collaboratively with partners to achieve this.
- **Delivering innovation**. Colleges will investigate the potential to create a national or open college which could provide open access to world-class learning, reflecting the swift changes to work and learning which have taken place. To drive proactive and innovative policy development, Colleges Scotland will scope the creation of a new policy think tank. Colleges will increasingly work with universities to shape the innovation landscape.
- Making **smart investments** with limited resources, to deliver long-term sustainable financial investment for colleges. We will advocate strongly and visibly for appropriate resources to provide high standard facilities for our students and our workforce in a refreshed conversation about funding for estates. Colleges will continue to be efficient and provide an excellent return for investment. We will work with the Scottish and UK Governments to rebalance the loss of funding to colleges because of the UK's exit from the European Union.



# Supporting students

**Our ambition is to support students to unlock their potential. We will fully support students to participate in excellent education, teaching, and skills training, available locally and with different methods of delivery, and to everyone whatever their age, ability or circumstance. We recognise the disruption caused by the pandemic to young people and adults.**

## COLLEGES WILL MAKE AN IMPACT BY:

- **Listening to and empowering students**, understanding what they want and need from college as part of lifetime learning. We will deliver excellent education and teaching, skills training and smart investments, enabling students to unlock their potential with recognised and trusted qualifications delivered by strong curriculum programmes and a strong life skills framework. Colleges will continue to work closely with employers and will advocate for suitably resourced careers advice for college students. We will work to increase the baseline amount invested in each college student for education.
- Equipping the college workforce with the resources they need to **deliver excellence** for students. This investment is especially important because of the impact of the pandemic on the college workforce.
- **Strengthening pathways** in a truly tertiary system for students – seamlessly connecting schools, colleges, universities and employers.
- Advocating for **fair funding for college students** with decision makers, to ensure that anyone who wants to learn can access suitable grants and loans whatever route they take.
- **Supporting students** holistically, advocating for increased resource for mental health support, support for care experienced students and maximising the college experience for students with additional support needs, vulnerabilities and disabilities. We will recognise the impact of poverty and digital poverty and address these with effective funding bids.
- Promoting the importance of **higher technical and professional qualifications**.
- Assessing the **current qualifications landscape** and challenging how well this meets the needs of the future workforce.



# Supporting communities

**Our ambition is to build on the pride we collectively hold as anchor institutions in our communities and to be resilient partners for the stakeholders around us. Colleges are part of a local, regional and national ecosystem which includes the third sector, local authorities, employers, public sector bodies and government. Colleges also connect internationally. We will capitalise on the opportunities with partners to do more for our students and communities, raising the profile of colleges with stakeholders and with the public.**

## COLLEGES WILL MAKE AN IMPACT BY:

- Being **anchor institutions**, recognising the rich history and generational connections colleges have within communities, being cognisant of the sense of place and belonging.
- **Looking local first**, responding to local needs and capitalising on local knowledge and expertise on economic, workforces and skills needs.
- Being **globally engaged**, strengthening the role and activities of Scotland's colleges on the international stage. In doing so, we can export our distinctive offering – pioneering thought leadership, universal access and provision of progression pathways – all of which have a major impact on social mobility.
- **Driving** a fundamental change in the volume and delivery mode of adult and lifelong learning, enabling adults to gain the skills and knowledge that help them as parents, citizens and members of local communities.
- Integrating colleges into national efforts to revitalise towns and communities by playing an active role in the development of **20-minute neighbourhoods** as well as measures to increase accessibility for students in rural and remote areas.
- Continuing work to realise the shared ambition between colleges and the Scottish Government of **widening access** to education for people from all backgrounds, of all ages, ethnicity and disability. We will increase equality and diversity in the makeup of college leadership and staff to address underrepresentation of minority ethnic groups of staff in tertiary education.
- Minimising the **environmental impact** of colleges, including taking behavioural changes from the pandemic into account when planning around travel and the potential benefits of hybrid learning and working. Colleges will continue to embrace our role in tackling the climate emergency, driving Scotland towards becoming a net-zero emission economy and embedding sustainability across the sector.



# Supporting industry

**Our ambition is** to affirm the role of colleges as a core business support enabler and as the first choice delivery partner for work-based skills and training in Scotland.

## COLLEGES WILL MAKE AN IMPACT BY:

- Building colleges into the regional economy discussion at every level, working across our **regional partnerships** to increase the role of colleges in economic recovery, development and regeneration.
- Creating an environment that supports a symbiotic relationship between **colleges and industry** – where colleges are the cornerstone of future workforce development and business growth and embed skills in the areas which need them most.
- **Supporting** two specific recommendations of the College of the Future Report (2020). Firstly, by committing to widening the remit of all colleges to include the provision of services to businesses as well as education and training, particularly towards SMEs. This will accelerate strategic partnerships between employers and colleges, help to embed colleges as key partners locally and regionally and increase national productivity and innovation. Secondly, by achieving investment for the development of specialist college ‘Employer Hubs’. These would act as a one-stop-shop for employers, offering support on skills needs and strategic advice.
- Maximising college provision of **apprentices** and other work-based training intrinsic to colleges, which support employers and help to build a highly trained workforce which fits economic needs.
- Working to recover and then grow **commercial income** for colleges, dented by the pandemic.
- **Supporting employers** through the Just Transition, and move to net zero by 2045.
- **Increasing sensitivity** and responding at pace, to the rapid changes taking place across Scottish business, society and the economy. Colleges are well-placed to be agile and responsive to demands for new ways of learning and a rapidly redefined workforce, delivering lifelong learning which fits the needs of a changing economy.



# Supporting Scotland

**Our ambition is to deliver positive impacts for Scotland through the activity of colleges. Hand-in-hand with the economic recovery is the opportunity to unlock the untapped potential of a stronger and more empowered college sector, helping Scotland to thrive. When colleges thrive, Scotland thrives.**

## COLLEGES WILL MAKE AN IMPACT BY:

- Working across our **regional partnerships** to increase the role of colleges in economic recovery and regeneration. **Nationally**, we will be a trusted partner across the Four Capitals which underly the Scottish Government's ethos – Business, Community, Environment and People – maximising opportunities and making the voice of the college sector heard. **Locally**, colleges will be resilient partners for the stakeholders around us.
- Establishing recovery from the pandemic and then continue to make **positive gains** in the measures set out in the Scottish Government National Performance Framework.
- Responding to the **climate emergency**. Colleges will educate and train students to support the strategic needs of the green economy, providing a pathway to good, green jobs, supporting the ambitions of the Just Transition Commission. We will engage with Scotland's Covid-19 recovery plans and play our part in creating a fair and green future economy. And as institutions, colleges will reduce carbon footprints, again making smart and creative investments to reduce and mitigate our impact on the environment.
- Continuing to **develop and invest** in the college workforce for the future, attracting talent, providing high quality continuing professional development and career paths for our staff. Colleges will invest in staff and play our part in the Fair Work agenda. We will deliver impact for our students by equipping the college workforce with the resources they need to deliver excellence for students. This investment is especially important because of the impact of the pandemic on our staff, including the rapid pivot to online and blended learning. Workforce development will be cognisant of the growing demand for higher level technical and professional skills needed in the Scottish economy.
- Supporting the National Joint Negotiating Committee as a means of **delivering progress** and sustainable outcomes for college staff, in partnership with trade unions.

# Colleges

● ARGYLL COLLEGE UHI  
[www.argyll.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.argyll.uhi.ac.uk)

● AYRSHIRE COLLEGE  
[www.ayrshire.ac.uk](http://www.ayrshire.ac.uk)

● BORDERS COLLEGE  
[www.borderscollege.ac.uk](http://www.borderscollege.ac.uk)

● CITY OF GLASGOW COLLEGE  
[www.cityofglasgowcollege.ac.uk](http://www.cityofglasgowcollege.ac.uk)

● DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COLLEGE  
[www.dumgal.ac.uk](http://www.dumgal.ac.uk)

● DUNDEE AND ANGUS COLLEGE  
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[www.edinburghcollege.ac.uk](http://www.edinburghcollege.ac.uk)

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● NEW COLLEGE LANARKSHIRE  
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● NORTH EAST SCOTLAND COLLEGE  
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● SABHAL MÒR OSTAIG UHI  
[www.smo.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk)

● SCOTLAND'S RURAL COLLEGE  
[www.sruc.ac.uk](http://www.sruc.ac.uk)

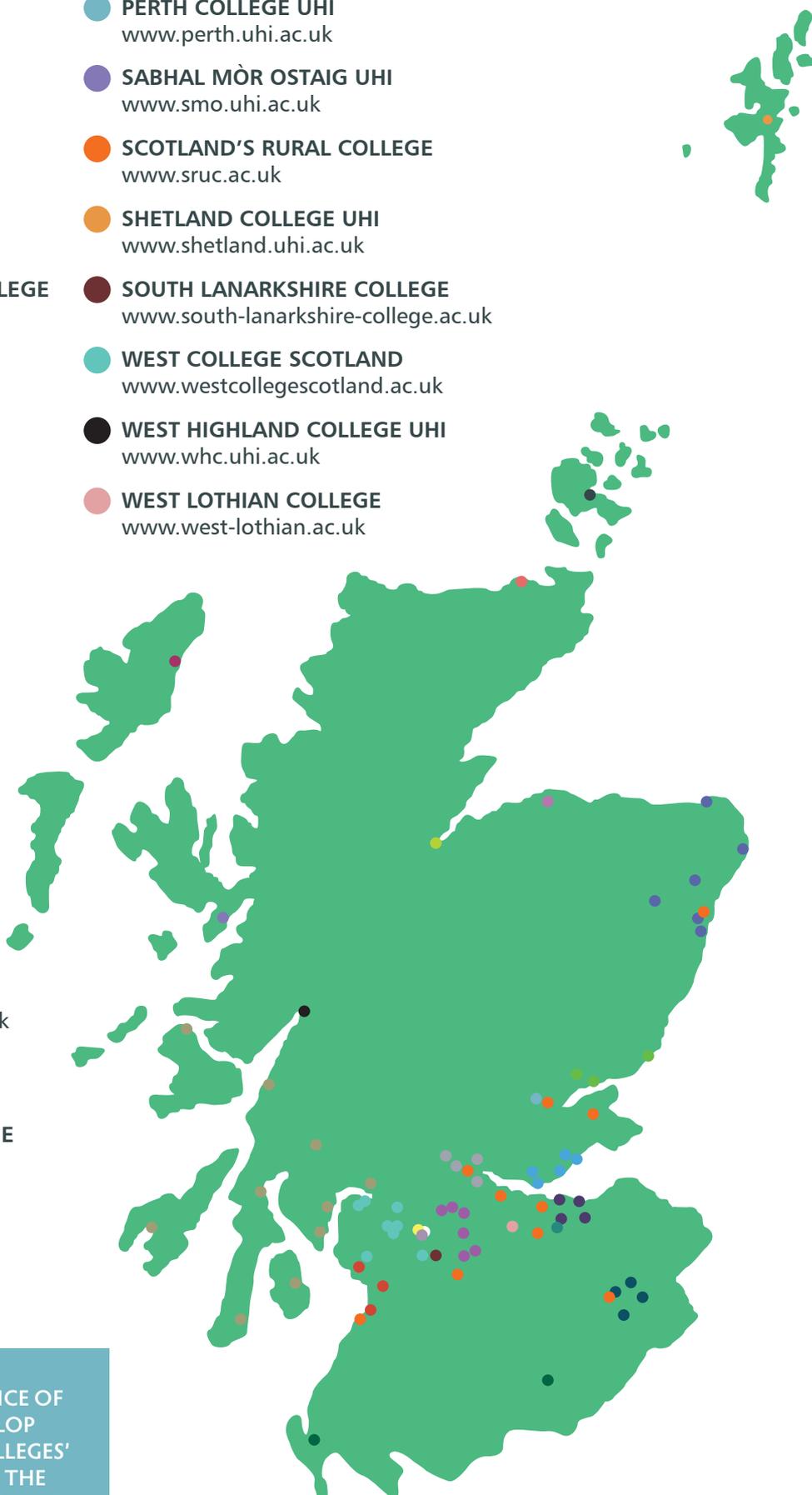
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