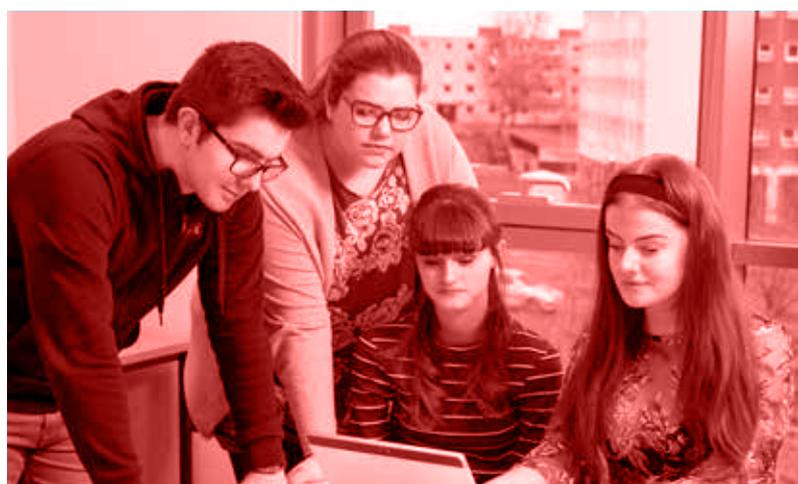


# Colleges Scotland Strategy 2022 – 2026







# Introduction

Colleges Scotland is the Membership organisation for colleges across the country: campaigning, advocating and influencing policy on behalf of the sector. Colleges Scotland is at the heart of a world class college sector that is recognised, valued, and available to all. Colleges Scotland is a connecting organisation, harnessing the capacity of wider sector resource to produce greater impact and have more influence with key stakeholders.

Our organisation is proud to support the delivery of Scottish Government objectives, and facilitate sustainable funding to the sector, while at the same time developing opportunities for further funding in a challenging financial climate.

With this Strategy, our Members have clarity about work we carry out on their behalf and within our resources.

Our outputs are accountable, transparent and accessible. We are making and will continue to make positive changes in the policy landscape, and we demonstrate our impact effectively to our Members, decision makers, the media, college students and staff, and the general public. We listen to our Members and are highly responsive to developing events which may impact on their success. Colleges are recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic and this Strategy is designed to help our Members succeed in that recovery. Last year the sector published a refreshed Statement of Ambition which also aligns with the work Colleges Scotland will take forward. When colleges thrive, Scotland thrives.



Shona Struthers,  
Chief Executive



Dr Waiyin Hatton,  
Chair, Colleges Scotland,  
on behalf of the Board



## Vision

When Colleges Thrive, Scotland Thrives. Colleges Scotland as the voice of the sector supports the delivery of thriving colleges at the heart of a thriving Scotland.

## Purpose

Colleges Scotland exists to promote, influence and exemplify colleges as they deliver world-class education and training to students and their contribution to Scotland's economic, climate, social, and international ambitions.

## Performance Indicators – our Strategy Trackers

Colleges Scotland will work to a well defined set of Strategy Trackers in a Dashboard, which measure our progress on promoting, influencing and exemplifying the college sector. These will be scrutinised by the Board and can adapt with Board agreement over time.

## Strategy

Our Strategic Aims are:

**Strategic Aim 1 – Lead and influence policy**

**Strategic Aim 2 – Raise the Profile and Enhance the Reputation of Scotland's Colleges Sector**

**Strategic Aim 3 – Advocate for the delivery of Increased Sector Resource**

**Strategic Aim 4 – Be an Enabler, Supporter and Connector of the Sector Membership, both internally and externally**

**Strategic Aim 5 – Be an Improving Organisation providing Value for Money for our Members**



## What underpins our Strategic Aims?

**Our Strategic Aims have been developed with the expertise and input of our Membership and external stakeholder consultation – these are the four key strategies which underpin and which will help to deliver our Aims.**

**An enhanced and performing Sector Champion model** which deploys the experience and expertise of our Members effectively, and to the benefit of the sector overall. By using this capacity, we will engage and build new relationships and create new collaborations and networks, helping to build the partnerships we all need. This will also help to achieve greater visibility and understanding of the value and impact the sector has on social and economic prosperity.

To deliver our purpose, Colleges Scotland will strive to deliver greater visibility and understanding of the sector's role within the wider education landscape, as well as the value and impact the sector has on social and economic prosperity, and also to tackle critical issues facing Members nationally. **Stakeholder engagement and influencing** across Scottish civic society with long-term relationship building, comprehensive engagement, is therefore a critical key strategic enabler.

**Clear policy priorities for Colleges Scotland** are vital to make the most impact with our partners and deliver progress for our Members. We will seek to regularly share evidence and stories from our work and those we work alongside to support wider conversations around education, colleges as civic anchors, colleges as a critical part of Scotland's skills-led recovery, and as leaders in the climate emergency story.

**Delivering research, creating evidence and gathering data for change** is a core strategy which is woven throughout all parts of our Strategic Aims. Clever and timely use of research, evidence and data can significantly increase our influence with decision makers, and tell our story more effectively to the public, students, economic partners, and other stakeholders. High-quality research output, sometimes delivered with partners, will be clearly aligned to the needs of our Members and focused on 'horizon-scanning' issues which could support the success of the sector.

## Strategic Aim 1 – Lead and influence policy

Colleges Scotland will prioritise opportunities for influencing policy which impact our Members and which help deliver the sector's Statement of Ambition. Colleges are the key part of Scotland's skills-led recovery and the innovation, future skills, delivering net-zero and enabling business and industry to thrive and these policy levers will be influenced by Colleges Scotland.

Our work will be aligned to the Scottish Government's Programme for Government, the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, the National Performance Framework, and take the recommendations of the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability into account in advocating for policy change which benefits our Members. Colleges Scotland will support Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council and other key stakeholders to know and understand what the priorities for the sector are as policies are developed.

Colleges Scotland will be both proactive in seeking to deliver the change sought by the sector and involved in key policy areas before they are finalised, engaging early in the process, and horizon scanning for emerging issues which could impact our Members. The Policy Team within Colleges Scotland will articulate clearly and demonstrate our impact on policy, showing successful interventions, collaborations, and influence, with a Policy Influence strategy which has clear measurement and evaluation indicators (based on the UK Government Policy Influence model) which clearly demonstrates the impact of our policy work.

The key policy areas for the period of this Strategy, unless amended by the Board, will be:

- Economic transformation – economic and socially inclusive prosperity including the climate emergency.
- Equality of opportunity – addressing inequalities and equity of people's ability to be economically active.
- Influencing and engaging with Scottish Government's Strategic Intent piece.

Policy research and data gathering is an important part of our ability to lead and influence policy. To gain the most efficiency, Colleges Scotland will take two actions over the course of this Strategy which will enhance our evidence base for policy issues: working more closely with the College Development Network's (CDN) Research and Enhancement Centre to produce research with impacts both policy and practice, on issues such as student poverty and climate emergency challenges for the sector; and create our own effective research which is beneficial to our Members and which supports our Aim of leading and influencing policy. This internal research function will horizon scan for developing policy issues which impact our Members. This will be an effective way to provide both thought leadership, provocation and useful challenge to the sector while also providing a more useful approach to communicating effectively with sector leaders such as SFC and Scottish Government.

We will increase the visibility of our policy work with external and sector events, and by telling our story through social and traditional media which reaches key stakeholders.



## Strategic Aim 1 – Strategy Trackers

- A** Develop a Policy Influence Strategy which has clear measurement and evaluation indicators (based on the UK Government Policy Influence model) which clearly demonstrates the impact of our policy work.
- B** Successfully deliver a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the CDN Research and Enhancement Centre which allows for affordable and impactful joint working on key research themes which cross both policy and practice and which help to deliver our Strategic Aims.
- C** Explore and commission research opportunities with external partners such as IPPR, YouGov, etc and harness the inherent expertise and resource within the sector which furthers our ability to lead and influence policy including horizon scanning for emerging issues. We will produce research regularly and within our resources which make an impact with stakeholders and which is useful for understanding the position of the sector across all colleges.
- D** Deliver impactful policy work on the three key areas identified agreed by the Board: Economic Transformation / Equality of Opportunity / influencing the Statement of Intent.
- E** Provide a concise monthly Policy Update on key issues and our activities, exclusively for Colleges Scotland Members.
- F** Hold regular external events with Members and stakeholders on policy themes.



## Strategic Aim 2 – Raise the Profile and Enhance the Reputation of Scotland’s Colleges Sector

We will use our voice to support, inform, champion and inspire. We will seek to regularly share evidence and stories from our work and those we work alongside to support wider conversations around education, colleges as civic anchors, colleges as a critical part of Scotland’s skills-led recovery, and as leaders in the climate emergency story.

We will build greater visibility and understanding of the value and impact the college sector has on social and economic prosperity, and the ways in which the sector supports solutions to the climate emergency. We will tell the college sector’s story, nationally, informed by individual colleges and policy issues.

### Strategic Aim 2 – Strategy Trackers

- A** A refreshed communications and public affairs plan is developed for the Board, aligned to this Strategy.
- B** Volume of coverage across traditional coverage and social media is tracked and increased over time.
- C** Colleges Scotland will hold regular events such as Parliamentary Receptions and Strategic Dialogues with external partners.
- D** Provide a daily press and parliamentary briefing, exclusive to Members.
- E** Hold the secretariat for a parliamentary Cross Party Group and regularly update the Board on those events, inviting Board members to be presenters where appropriate and with the agreement of the MSP chair.



## Strategic Aim 3 – Advocate for the delivery of Increased Sector Resource

Colleges Scotland will work with Members, the SFC and Scottish Government to advocate for sustainable sector resource. This will include influencing the Resource Spending Review, and annual Scottish Government budget settlements.

Sustainable levels of funding are essential to maintain high standards and high-quality education. Advocating for sustainable sector resource will include using the evidence and data from Strategic Aim 1 to influence decisions around Scotland's social, economic and climate prosperity, the importance of colleges as regional organisations, as civic anchors, and as part of their local communities, advocating for the recommendations of the Cumberford-Little Report and the The Scottish College of the Future Report.

Sustainable financial conditions also extend to college students as individuals. Colleges Scotland will work with Members and external partners and stakeholders to advocate for cost-of-living measures and support to alleviate student poverty which can help students to learn and achieve their potential, supporting those who may be most disadvantaged.

### Strategic Aim 3 – Strategy Trackers

- A** Colleges Scotland will influence the Scottish Government and the SFC on sustainable funding policies, evidenced by high quality engagement with Ministers and officials.
- B** Increase cross portfolio advocacy over time to support increased funding coming into the sector from non Advanced Learning and Science directorates and other Cabinet portfolios.
- C** Develop a funding model for the sector including capital infrastructure.
- D** Campaign on the place of the sector throughout the development of the Statement of Intent.
- E** Provide evidence from the sector to appropriate networks, working groups and consultations where we can make the most impact, balanced against our resources. Regularly review the impact of this work on legislation and policies in the sector.



## Strategic Aim 4 – Be an Enabler, Supporter and Connector of the Sector Membership, both internally and externally

Using our network, we will start discussions, encourage new voices into the conversation, and make connections that will allow effective and successful approaches to delivering our Members policy priorities.

We will build diverse coalitions of partners who share our vision of 'When Colleges Thrive, Scotland Thrives' to develop longer-term programmes of work in specific areas.

Colleges Scotland will provide opportunities, advice and support to all Members equally so that smaller institutions without same resources/functions as large colleges can access the same quality resources.

### Strategic Aim 4 – Strategy Trackers

- A** Annual external stakeholder perception survey of a) Colleges Scotland and b) the sector.
- B** Develop an effective stakeholder database of college sector champions (Chairs, Lead Principals, College Board Members) who will work with external stakeholders on specific elements of the college sector story. New and more effective relationships are formed across the Stakeholder Map to tell the sector story.
- C** Reform the Lead Principals system including a regular refresh point. Enhance the reputation and visibility of Lead Principals with media coverage and engagement opportunities with stakeholders.
- D** Work with the Board to identify sector leaders who can work with Executives on specific policy issues.
- E** Support regular meetings of the College Principals' Group as an advisory committee to the Board.
- F** Provide the Board with an annual insight report into specific data sought from colleges on emerging issues and the impact gained from that data by Colleges Scotland.

## Strategic Aim 5 – Be an Improving Organisation providing Value for Money for our Members

Colleges Scotland is a charitable company limited by guarantee which is committed to being a modern, adaptable, inclusive and sustainable employer.

We invest in our staff and support their development. Colleges Scotland will gain best value for the investment from our Members by working efficiently and flexibly, steadily reducing our carbon footprint, and embracing new ways of working which support overall productivity alongside staff wellbeing.

We will protect the investment from our Members with strong accounting, audit and risk procedures, reporting our activity to the Office of Scotland's Charity Regulator (OSCR) and upholding the Colleges Scotland Code of Conduct. We live our Code of Conduct values with ways of working which are efficient, innovative and agile.

Members believe in our purpose and want to work with us to achieve sector ambitions. Colleges Scotland offers unique value and deliver benefits to Members, beyond the financial and transactional benefits that traditional membership organisations provide – engagement, networking and influence – and will listen to Members and understand their needs. Our activity is clearly measured and reported transparently to Members and stakeholders.

### Strategic Aim 5 – Strategy Trackers

- A** Nurture our staff and ensure their wellbeing, professional training, and improve staff retention at Colleges Scotland.
- B** Live our Code of Conduct values with ways of working which are efficient, innovative and agile. Publish an Annual Report and Annual Accounts as a charitable company limited by guarantee and as required by OSCR. Report annually to the Board on our reducing carbon footprint.
- C** Develop and regularly update a Member Benefits and Value Statement articulating the distinct benefits of Membership.
- D** Carry out regular Member Benefit and Value satisfaction check-ins.
- E** Deliver a clear and transparent understanding of the Colleges Scotland subscription model for the future.
- F** Using these Strategy Trackers in a dashboard, report our activity, progress and business risks to the Board and publish our activity online to deliver stakeholder transparency and assure them of our activity.
- G** Deliver MoUs with CDN and College Employers Scotland that embed good governance arrangements, reduce duplication of effort and provide value for money for the sector.



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