



College
Employers
Scotland

Annual Report

1 August 2023 –
31 July 2024

Introduction



This is my tenth and final annual report as Chief Executive of Colleges Scotland as I move on to new opportunities after a successful decade with the organisation.

Colleges Scotland in 2014 was a very different organisation, with only four members of staff. I'm proud that our capacity has grown over this period to better serve members interests. I'm also pleased that during my time leading College Scotland, the profile of the college sector has grown, and college education is now more visible with decision makers and influencers. *When Colleges Thrive, Scotland Thrives* has been the phrase I've used over the past few years to emphasise the truly transformative nature of college education for individuals and Scotland's economy. I've been determined in my efforts to amplify that message whenever possible.

Colleges are and will always be to me the place where new opportunities flourish. Taking people on a journey of cutting edge technical education, or supporting

people who are far away from the labour market and giving them the chance at learning valuable skills education, and furnishing employers with a better equipped workforce are proof of the vital role colleges have.

Although I am moving on from Colleges Scotland I would commend the staff, my colleagues, who work tirelessly on members' behalf to promote the college experience to this generation of students, and to protect it for the next. I've been privileged to see the results of their work in a wide range of areas, including helping to establish a national network of active sports coordinators, protecting mental health services as much as has been possible, and celebrating the success of college graduates contribution to the economy.

In leaving this role and in presenting this final report of our activity for 2023/24, I would again ask that the college sector receives the investment it deserves so that our 24 colleges can continue the life changing, life enhancing work they currently do.

Shona Struthers
Chief Executive



Corporate

As at the 31st July 2024, Colleges Scotland employed 19 members of staff across the organisation (17.5 full-time equivalent (FTE)). The Policy, Corporate, Communications and Public Affairs teams, comprise of 11 members of staff (9.9 FTE) with some working across both sides of the organisation, and the College Employers Scotland team comprises of 8 members of staff (7.6 FTE) and continues to carry vacancies.

The organisation welcomed three new board members during the year – **Abhishek Agarwal** (Regional Chair, Forth Valley College), **Derek Smeall** (Principal and Chief Executive, Glasgow Kelvin College), and **Sue Cook** (Regional Chair, West Lothian College).

The Colleges Scotland board met **four** times during 2023/24 and the Annual General Meeting was held in March 2024.

Throughout 2023/24, the organisation has continued to look at where it could streamline operations and make savings and efficiencies on its back-office functions. As part of this work, we managed to renegotiate contracts and significantly lower costs relating to our utility bills, insurance, and phone providers.

During 2023/24, the lease has been agreed for our office space which we plan to develop further as Scotland's college hub. Repairs and improvements have increased the number of meeting rooms available and there has been investment in **digital meeting technology** for the sector to use. Argyll Court has two welcome sub-tenants – ESP (Energy Skills Partnership) and WorldSkills UK, Scotland.

During the year Colleges Scotland transitioned to new suppliers for finance and HR and we achieved a successful external audit for the Year End 31st July 2023.

As part of the organisation's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy, Colleges Scotland has teamed up with Stirlingshire Voluntary Enterprise (SVE), Stirling's local third sector interface. Activity has included hosting Stirling's Third Sector Breakfast Club meetings at Argyll Court and taking part in the judging of SVE's Inspire Volunteering Awards and some members of staff **volunteering** at the awards ceremony.



Policy Activity

Throughout 2023/24, Colleges Scotland has continued to advocate on behalf of the college sector for sustainable funding, appropriate flexibilities and relevant policies to allow delivery for our learners, and to assist in returning colleges to a position of stability and sustainability, against an extremely challenging funding landscape.

Colleges Scotland has also supported senior sector leaders in concluding the **Think the Unthinkable workstream**. This has progressed into three short life working groups (SLWGs) – Skills Led Regions, Future Workforce, and Funding and Infrastructure – which have actively developed and accelerated activity relating to the Reform to 2026 agenda.

These key pieces of proactive work are seeking to position the college sector at the heart of the Scottish Government's **Education Reform** Agenda, and to ensure that colleges are ready to play their part fully in skilling up the current

and next generation of the workforce, both of which are required to deliver the Just Transition agenda and economic growth for Scotland.

Through the Funding and Infrastructure Short Life Working Group (SLWG) we also worked closely with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) to take forward priorities relating to **estates and infrastructure**.

Work also progressed from Think the Unthinkable related to the sector's workforce. A workforce planning workshop, organised by College Employers Scotland (CES) in conjunction with the HR Strategic Group, was held. The purpose of this workshop was to bring together external views and expertise on strategic workforce planning from other parts of the Scottish public sector, and to share college sector best practice. The workshop was attended by college HR leaders, and representatives from other public bodies, such as NHS 24, Audit Scotland and CDN.



Other significant areas of policy work included:

- The submission of a formal sector response to the **Scottish Covid-19 Inquiry**, as well as continuing to engage with Inquiry officials and supporting them in their engagement with the wider college sector.
- The development of a National Digital Strategy, and accompanying Implementation Plan, for the college sector in Scotland through the **Digital Transformation** workstream established from Think the Unthinkable.
- Engaging with the SFC on the ongoing delivery of the **College Infrastructure Strategy**, supporting partners in the delivery and completion of a Baseline exercise, involving colleges providing up-to-date baseline information for their estate to inform future investment requirements. This is simultaneous to continued advocacy for funding to mitigate the impact of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in the wider college estate.
- Development of a new Skills Development Scotland (SDS) **Careers – College Partnership Agreement (SCCPA)**, further to the work convened jointly with SDS and college sector representatives to review and reform the existing partnership agreement in line with the Career Review recommendations.
- Securing confirmation from the Scottish Government for the derogation of business insurance to continue until July 2027, which if not secured would have placed colleges in a position of having to put in place arrangements to self-insure at short notice.
- Working closely with Scottish Government officials in the development and launch of the **International Education Strategy**. We have worked with Universities Scotland and Brand Scotland to help raise the profile of colleges within the international education space.
- Working with Scottish Government to take forward the Scottish Educational Exchange Programme (SEEP) **Test and Learn Pilot** which provides opportunities for colleges to apply for up to £35k of grant funding to develop stronger international partnerships.
- Working with the sector to provide for **safer campuses** and held a webinar in collaboration with Emily Test and CDN about the collection of criminal convictions data across the college sector and how we can work in partnership to develop a common, robust and proportionate approach to collecting criminal convictions data across the sector.
- Working with sportscotland and Scottish Student Sport to oversee the rollout of the **Active Campus Network** across the college sector, strengthening the existing network of sport and physical activity staff.



- Continued working closely with Universities Scotland through the co-convened **Joint Articulation Group**, progressing the Articulation agenda, including work around the current definition of Articulation and progressing the recommendations made by the National Articulation Forum.
- Engagement with the Scottish Government and SFC through the **Tripartite Alignment Group**, working with senior sector leaders to develop and deliver proposals to address the financial sustainability pressures currently facing the college sector. This has included the agreement around assets disposals for colleges to implement.
- Collaborating with **WorldSkills** in supporting the ongoing participation of Scotland's colleges in WorldSkills competitions on both a national and international level, whilst engaging in a Stakeholder Ambassador Group to support the implementation of WorldSkills standards across the college sector in Scotland.
- Liaising with Scottish Government officials around the ongoing development of the **Student Mental Health Action Plan**, articulating the sector requirements to best support student mental health and wellbeing, whilst also continuing to work closely with Think Positive to support the development of institutional Student Mental Health Agreements.
- Working with the SFC and other representatives from across Scotland's tertiary sector through the **Tertiary Quality Steering Group** to contribute towards shaping the new Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework (TQEF) which is changing how quality and assurance is conducted and assessed in Scotland's colleges, to help deliver the best learning experience for learners.
- Engaging with Scottish Government officials on the **Just Transition Plan**, to ensure the role of the college sector in this agenda is reflected within these areas, whilst also working with ESP to articulate the skills requirements and associated investment to meet future industry demand.
- Progressing work around a "**Colleges First**" approach to Modern Apprenticeship delivery, engaging with the Scottish Government through the Modern Apprenticeship Working Group in addition to key stakeholders including SDS and Construction Industry Training Board in relation to Apprenticeship funding. This is in addition to simultaneous work around enhancing both Foundation and Graduate Apprenticeships.
- Leading the college sector response to the **Widening Access** agenda and engagement with the Commissioner for Fair Access, Professor John McKendrick around the role of colleges in supporting the delivery of Widening Access targets as established by the Scottish Government, whilst considering the future role of the Commissioner in relation to tertiary education.

Colleges Scotland also supports internal meetings of the College Chairs' Group and the College Principals' Group as well as additional short life working groups that the sector is involved with.

Provided attendance and support to the following meetings:

6 College Chairs' Group	9 College Principals' Group	2 College Funding Group
4 College Sector Finances Committee	7 Capital and Infrastructure Meetings	1 Capital and Infrastructure Workshop
5 College Infrastructure Delivery Group	14 Skills Led Regions Meetings	7 Funding and Infrastructure Short Life Working Group
9 Future Funding & Infrastructure Meetings	1 Workforce Short Life Working Group	1 Future Workforce Meeting
18 Digital Transformation Meetings	6 National Digital Strategy Workshops	13 Modern Apprenticeship Working Group
5 Graduate Apprenticeship Enhancement Group	3 Foundation Apprenticeship Enhancement Group	1 Access Delivery Group
11 Articulation Meetings	8 National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy – Strategic Working Group	1 CDN Research & Enhancement Centre Advisory Group
20 Career Review Related Meetings	16 Climate Change and Green Skills Meetings	15 Mental Health Meetings
4 sportsotland and Brit Challenge Meetings	3 ESCU Core Leadership Group	4 Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework Steering Group
5 DfE Turing Scheme Colleges (FE/VET) Stakeholder Panel	10 International Education Strategy and SEEP Meetings	8 NHS Anchors Strategic Workforce Strategic Group
8 NHS Anchors Strategic Workforce Strategic Group	1 Further Education Student Support Advisory Group	4 Prevent Sub-group
11 WorldSkills Meetings	7 Tripartite Alignment Group	10 Covid-19 Inquiry Meetings
8 Fraser Allander Institute Project	2 Good Governance Steering Group Meetings	

Consultation Responses

Colleges Scotland has developed and submitted sector position papers and/or consultation responses to the Scottish Government on:

- The Education (Scotland) Bill
- Care Leaver Payment: Consultation on Policy Proposals
- Independent Review of Community Learning and Development
- Draft Scottish National Adaptation Plan (2024 – 2029)
- Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill.



“Throughout this year, Colleges Scotland continued to strongly support the college sector. Whilst colleges had difficult decisions to make given funding cuts, they continue to have a strong ambition to grow, to support learners and to provide the workforce required to ensure economic growth in Scotland. This is a difficult balancing act, but one in which a robust collective voice at a national level is vital. Colleges Scotland also demonstrated why it is critical to have that convening power, as it developed future thinking through the Think the Unthinkable workstream.

It has been great to work with such wonderful people from the college sector over this last year, to help deliver for our learners.”

– Andy Witty, Director of Strategic Policy and Corporate Governance



Communications and Public Affairs Activity

Throughout 2023/24, **political engagement** remained high with MPs, MSPs, civil servants and government Ministers. Colleges Scotland in this period held nine meetings with Scottish Ministers and MSPs to discuss the college sector.

John Swinney was appointed as the **new First Minister of Scotland** in May 2024, with Jenny Gilruth and Graeme Dey remaining in post as the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Veterans respectively. Colleges Scotland has continued ongoing engagement on behalf of the sector including hosting an all chairs and principals meeting in Stirling with the Minister in January 2024. The Cabinet Secretary gave a keynote address to the Colleges Scotland 2024 conference, and there has been extensive engagement with the Minister.

A **General Election** was held in July 2024 and we published a manifesto in the run up calling for the next government to support Scotland's colleges.



Parliamentary activity has remained a key focus, particularly around sector finances. The Public Audit Committee discussed Audit Scotland's report on Scotland's colleges in November 2023 with Andy Witty, our Director of Strategic Policy and Corporate Governance, and Derek Smeall, Principal of Glasgow Kelvin College giving evidence. The Finance

and Public Administration Committee took evidence from our CEO Shona Struthers on the Draft Budget in January 2024 as did the Education, Children and Young People Committee in June 2024. Separately, the Economy and Fair Work Committee held an inquiry into the disability employment gap and Anne-Maire Sturrock, Vice Principal - Student Experience, Borders College, gave evidence on behalf of the sector in May 2024.



We participated in and arranged speakers from the sector for **six** parliamentary Cross Party Groups in 2023/24 and providing the secretariat to the **Cross Party Group on Skills**, as well as supporting Universities Scotland with the **Cross Party Group on Colleges and Universities**.



Publications and Events



The annual Keyfacts booklet was published in early September 2023.

Our **Parliamentary Reception** in September 2023 was hosted by Michael Marra MSP. The annual event provided the opportunity to meet many colleagues from across the sector as well as MSPs for networking. The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Veterans provided a keynote address and student Tori-Leigh Adams from West Lothian College shared her inspirational story.



Colleges Scotland worked with the **Fraser of Allander Institute** to launch a research report into the economic contribution of college graduates in October 2023.



The report showed that the Scottish economy will be **£52 billion** better off cumulatively over the 40-year working life of college graduates, when compared to an economy without these skilled graduates.

In February 2024, we worked with **Reform Scotland** to develop their event, Can Scotland's Colleges Thrive?, which was in the format of a busy panel discussion.





We held a successful **Conference** in April 2024 at City of Glasgow College with three panel sessions on the topics of climate emergency, fair access, and entrepreneurship, plus a keynote address by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Jenny Gilruth. A stakeholder dinner took place in the evening.



Colleges Scotland has worked with CDN and the Marketing Development Network on the annual **#ChooseCollege** and **#LoveScottlandsColleges** marketing campaigns.

Our Head of Communications and Public Affairs sat on the judging panel for the NUS Scotland Annual Awards and we attended the ceremony in Stirling to celebrate with the nominated college students.

We launched a **24 in 2024 Blog Series** in July 2024 to highlight the wide and deep variety of education, training, and community roles that Scotland's 24 colleges.

Media activity remained high and we continued to provide members with regular communications, including **40** media releases, statements, and interviews on a range key policy issues including student mental health, qualifications, the reform agenda, Scottish Budget, and college infrastructure. The Colleges Scotland website averaged **2,059** users per month and Colleges Scotland posts on X were seen on average **10,700** times per month.

We continued to issue Daily Monitoring Reports, monthly Policy Updates, and Lines to Take briefings to members.



"The profile and visibility of colleges in Scotland is rising with the media and with members of both parliaments. Obviously, the funding and investment challenges facing colleges means there is more pressure within the news agenda to also tell good news stories to enhance the reputation of our members with students, parents and employers."

– Jenifer Johnston, Head of Communications and Public Affairs

College Employers Scotland Activity

A new **Head of National Bargaining and a full-time HR Policy Officer** were appointed to support National Bargaining activity and policy development across the college sector.

A **National Agreement** was reached on a **cumulative £5,000 Pay Award for all college support staff for Academic Years (AYs) 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25**. This award delivers a near 16% average pay rise for support staff from September 2024, and a 21.5% increase for those staff on annual salaries of less than £25,000.

The new **Real Living Wage (£12 per hour)** was implemented by colleges in November 2023, six months ahead of a national deadline of 1 May 2024. The increase, which applied to all college employees and covered Modern Apprentices, provided a significant and timely income boost to lower-paid staff, and was promoted through a news release.

A **National Agreement** was reached on **registering all college lecturers with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)**. In addition, a Circular was published that sets out a timetable and deadlines for lecturer registration with GTCS via the full and provisional

(conditional) routes. The Agreement and Circular will support staff professional development and the world-class learning offer at Scotland's colleges.

A **National Disciplinary Policy** has been largely agreed, with work continuing to develop a model Procedure. This work is being progressed within the National Joint Negotiating Committee (NJNC), in partnership with trade unions.

A **lecturing staff pay offer** was made and included proposals for a **cumulative £5,000 pay rise over Academic Years (AYs) 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25**, as well as a **3% increase for 2025/26**. This has been promoted through communications across CES' digital and social media channels. The offer has also been promoted through written correspondence to college staff and key stakeholders such as MSPs.

College employers remain committed to the **National Job Evaluation** project and continue to work with the support staff trade unions (UNISON, Unite and GMB) to develop an updated Project Plan and Business Case. These will then be considered by a future NJNC – Side Table (Support) and CES.



Advice, guidance and support were provided to the following meetings:

41 Management Side Meetings and Briefing Sessions	7 College Employers Scotland Executive Group Meetings	8 College Employers Scotland Meetings
22 NJNC Side Table (Lecturing) Meetings	11 NJNC Side Table (Support) Meetings	2 NJNC Central Committee Meetings
11 Secretariat Meetings	4 NJNC Support Staff Job Evaluation Informal Meetings	3 NJNC Support Staff Terms and Conditions Working Group Meetings
2 Fair Work Working Group Meetings	2 National Policies Working Group Meetings	1 Lessons Learned – Short Life Working Group Meeting with CES Representatives
2 Lessons Learned meetings held by Minister with sector and trade union representatives; this was also attended by the Head of National Bargaining.		



68 communications briefings and email updates were provided to members: Updates following Side Table, Central Committees and Support Staff Job Evaluation (34); Circulars issued to the sector (1); Industrial Action Guide (1); Industrial Action email updates (31).

In addition to reactive comment, **30 proactive media releases and statements** (including an extended opinion article in FE News) were issued on pay negotiations and other developments such as early implementation of a higher Real Living Wage and roll-out of the college sector's Menopause Policy.

9 broadcast news interviews involving the CES Director were facilitated with media organisations including the BBC and STV.

12 sets of Key Messages (3 for lecturing and support staff combined; 4 for lecturing staff; 5 for support staff) were issued to support local communications activity.

15 formal engagement meetings were held with MSPs (13) and Ministers (2). Separate engagement meetings were also held with NUS Scotland and a councillor from Glasgow City Council.

Letters providing updates on pay negotiations were sent to college principals (2, with one designed as a template to aid local communications with staff), MSPs (1), and newspaper editors (1). In addition, **written briefings** (2) on key developments in the pay negotiations were issued to MSPs.



"This academic year has probably been the most challenging period in the history of National Bargaining. The tail end of the cost-of-living crisis has caused severe difficulties for employers in getting agreement on pay awards for college staff, which led to ongoing industrial action. Despite these difficulties, College Employers Scotland has assisted and advised members on the successful conclusion of a pay award to support staff and has also progressed key elements of national policies."

- Gavin Donoghue, Director of College Employers Scotland

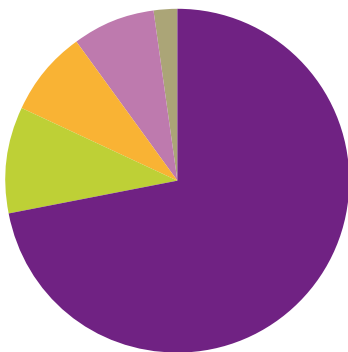


Funding

Colleges Scotland funding comes from two sources – sector subscriptions for Policy, Communications and Corporate, and funding from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for College Employers Scotland.

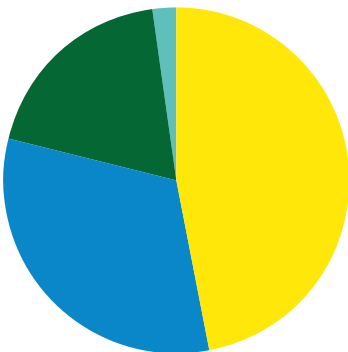
In 2023/24, income from sector subscriptions was £893k for Policy, Communications, Public Affairs and Corporate activity. Income from the SFC for College Employers Scotland was £996k, and a proportion is for corporate service support.

A breakdown of spend and analysis of key activities is outlined below:



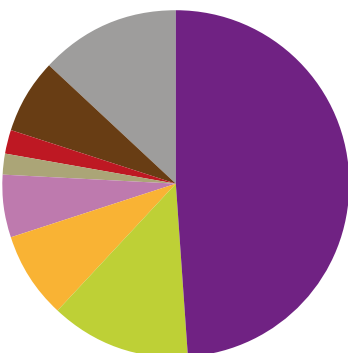
Colleges Scotland Spend (subscription funding)

- Staffing = 72%
- Other Staffing and Professional Fees = 10%
- Service Level Agreement and Office Facilities = 8%
- Communications, Hospitality and Consumables = 8%
- Depreciation = 2%



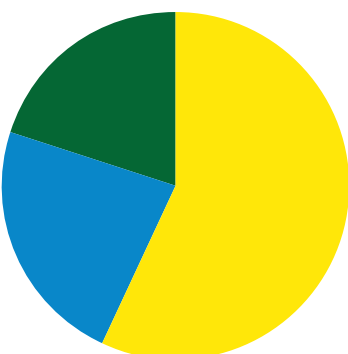
Colleges Scotland Activity

- Policy and Advocacy Activity = 47%
- Colleges Scotland Board and Committees = 32%
- Communications, Parliamentary and Stakeholder Engagement = 19%
- Servicing National Bargaining = 2%



College Employers Scotland Spend (SFC funding)

- Staffing = 49%
- Service Level Agreement and Office Facilities = 13%
- Other Staffing and Professional Fees = 8%
- Communications, Hospitality, Consumables, Development and Commissions = 6%
- Job Evaluation Software = 2%
- Depreciation = 2%
- Facilities Time = 7%
- Approximate Underspend = 13%



College Employers Scotland Activity

- Supporting the NJNC = 57%
- Supporting CES Activity = 23%
- Communications, Parliamentary and Stakeholder Engagement = 20%



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