College Sector of The Future
MSP Cross Party Reference Group
Meeting 2: 7 October 2026
Publication Date: 11 November 2026

Attendees

Gavin Donoghue, Colleges Scotland
Callum Chomczuk, College Employers Scotland
Jen Johnston, Colleges Scotland

Duncan Dunlop MSP, Scottish Liberal Democrats
Mundo Fraser MSP (substitute for Meghan Gallagher MSP) Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party
David Kirkwood MSP, Reform UK
Jenny Young MSP, Scottish Labour Party

Apologies from: Iris Duane MSP, Scottish Green Party

Meeting

Gavin opened the meeting and presented on the CSoTF workstream origins, the workstream design through three Pillars, progress to date, and next steps. There was then discussion on the following topics:

CSoTF and the broader agenda of Public Service Reform

CSoTF is taking place at the same time as the SG priority of Public Service Reform (PSR). GD reflected that the college sector has already reformed with regionalisation in 2014, and had reduced the headcount of its workforce by 13% compared to a 12% overall increase in the Scottish Public sector workforce, and has continued to deliver very high outcomes and student satisfaction.

The CSoTF workstream seeks to establish the purpose and functions of colleges in the first instance, before moving into assets and governance.

Later in the meeting there was reflection on the sector's proposals to the SFC's PSR initiatives, which have yet to be confirmed.

Financial sustainability of colleges

GD noted that colleges are operating from a very lean base following years of real-terms decreases in funding, and workforce reductions and that multiyear funding would support college stability during the ongoing CSoTF process.

Geographic position of college graduates

There was a short discussion on what colleges are able to provide locally and regionally in the context of where demand is for labour for example in the energy, defence or aeronautical sectors.

Types of qualification and the impact of technology

There was reflection on micro-credentials and the importance of buildable qualifications. AI and the limits of new technology was discussed within the framing of current / future labour market demands, and the varying levels of skills required for transferable employment between trades and professions.

Engagement with employers in CSoTF

GD unpacked the Pillar 2 process of regional and national workshops which are being delivered by an independent facilitator and noted that the views of employers and industry are being actively sought as part of CSoTF.

There was a discussion on existing college collaboration with business and industry, and on opportunities and constraints (including capital) in terms of maximising employer-college collaboration. There was discussion on the ability of colleges to respond to industry and labour market demand quickly, and with agility expected by employers.

Interaction points with the Future Framework for the Sustainability and Success of Scotland's Universities

GD noted the discussions being held with Co-Chairs of the FFSSSU and regular engagement with Universities Scotland and the potential for future cross over points between the workstreams that could be explored in the new year.

Senior phase

There was a brief discussion on the crossover points between school senior phase and colleges, GD noting the level of school-college partnerships already being delivered in colleges, and how this may be a helpful solution re the reduction in class contact hours at school level.

Gavin closed the meeting by stating there was an open line on communication about the process, and that there will be a further meeting in mid-November once the draft Pillar 2 report was available.

Actions

Dates sought for a meeting in mid November.

Close