

**Tuesday 26 September 2017**

**Colleges Scotland's Statement on the Scottish Funding Council Report on Widening Access 2015/16**

Commenting on the publication of the Scottish Funding Council's Report on Widening Access, Shona Struthers, Chief Executive, Colleges Scotland said:

"The Scottish Funding Council Report on Widening Access 2015/16 highlights that colleges continue to play a key role in providing access to education for learners of all ages and from all backgrounds and demonstrates that colleges are making positive steps to achieving the targets set out by the Commission on Widening Access.

"The report demonstrates what we as a sector already know; enrolling at college improves life chances for people and helps those furthest away from the labour market. College is still the primary source of post-16 education for those from deprived backgrounds and this is reinforced in the report with an increase year on year of entrants from the most deprived areas coming on to college courses. This figure now sitting at over 27% for full-time higher education and 34% for full-time further education for 2015/16 from the 20% most deprived postcodes.

"Scotland's learners are diverse and have wide range of needs and requirements. Our colleges, sited in local communities, are adept at meeting these needs by offering flexible provision across subjects, qualifications and types of delivery. For example, the college sector has always recognised, supported and facilitated alternative pathways to higher education institutions, to ensure that learners, regardless of age, background or gender have equal access to education. As highlighted in the report, the number of students studying higher education at college is increasing with the college sector now delivering 28% of all higher education provision in Scotland.

"The report also rightly highlights areas where there is room for improvement such as increasing retention rates for care experienced students, and the sector is actively engaged in work to make progress in these areas. For example, work is underway on the Scottish Government's National Improvement Programme with five colleges participating in the pilot project looking at retention and attainment. They are looking into what more colleges can do to ensure that learners successfully complete their courses and progress towards further study or their chosen career.

"Colleges are looking forward to continuing to progress the work they are already doing to help individuals overcome any barriers to learning and provide opportunities in local communities to promote fair access and social inclusion, support future career goals and help reduce poverty."

**ENDS**

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