

Agenda Article for The Herald:

By working together, we can achieve more for our learners

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Imagine a learner journey that is disjointed, duplicates learning and lacks focus on the end goal. Then imagine one which lets the learner move seamlessly onwards and upwards on their journey with a clear pathway to employment.

Which one would you choose?

Following a review of school governance, a new regional structure was announced for schools by the Deputy First Minister in June this year. Along with giving individual headteachers increased control over staffing, the curriculum and the use of funding, this new structure will also see local authorities grouped together to form six new Regional Improvement Collaboratives across Scotland. The purpose of these Collaboratives is to act as a regional platform for the sharing of skills, knowledge and resources across council boundaries and to work together for the benefit of the learner.

The college sector has much to contribute to these Collaboratives.

Following their own process of regionalisation, colleges have recent and valuable experience in working on a regional basis and would welcome the opportunity to share this knowledge. This will help to ensure that there is a wide and full curriculum on offer which supports the delivery of the required skills identified within a region, and trains and upskills the workforce of the future.

With the first stage of implementation imminent, it makes sense for regional colleges to work with schools to support the submission of the first draft of improvement plans in January 2018. Moving forward, planning the curriculum together will also ensure that all parts of the education system within a region are pulling in the same direction, which is in the best interest of learners, employers and the local community.

As educators, our prime focus should be ensuring that all pupils have the widest opportunities from the curriculum on offer. By working together, we can better support our young people to reach their full potential throughout their learner journey, as well as helping to achieve the Scottish Government's ambitions of closing the attainment gap, inclusive growth and widening access to further study for all learners in Scotland.

Sited in local communities, colleges are adept at meeting the needs of learners by offering flexible provision across subjects, qualifications and types of delivery, and it is this experience and capability that they can bring to the table to help support schools as part of this new reform.

Colleges have a long and successful history of ensuring that learners, regardless of age, background or gender, have equal access to education. College is still the primary source of post-16 education for those from deprived backgrounds and this is reinforced in the Scottish Funding Council's Report on Widening Access, which demonstrates an increase year on year of entrants from the most deprived areas coming on to college courses.

Colleges can also work with schools to support the delivery of technical, vocational and professional skills, where there may be staff shortages in certain subject areas to ensure that the curriculum on offer is as comprehensive as the region requires.

The potential of this reform could be significant if it is implemented effectively. Part of this is getting the correct partners round the table from the outset to take a co-ordinated approach, work together and drive standards upwards for the benefit of the learner.

For these Collaboratives to work to their best effect, and to provide the best and most appropriate education for every learner, not just while they are at school but also on their continuing learner journey, then it is vital that schools and colleges work together from an early stage to share knowledge, skills and experience.