

**Wednesday, 30 December 2020**

### **Comment on the Impact of Covid-19 on Fair Access Report**

Commenting on the Commissioner for Fair Access's *Impact of Covid-19 on Fair Access* report published today (Wednesday, 30 December 2020), Shona Struthers, Chief Executive of Colleges Scotland, said:

"The Commissioner's report confirms what we expected – COVID-19 has had an adverse effect, particularly for the most disadvantaged, and the report also underlines the importance of addressing fair access. Therefore, ensuring progress will be even more critical over the next few years, a challenge that colleges will rise to as we go forward.

"The report rightly highlights digital poverty as an issue that needs to be addressed. The global pandemic has accelerated the use of online and digital learning across the sector and it's more important than ever that students are able to fully participate in that as colleges continue with blended learning. No one should be left behind because of lack of access to the necessary equipment and technology.

"The report also highlights the impact on staff, with colleges working hard throughout the pandemic to deliver remote learning and to ensure that students have devices to access their classes online. There remains, however, challenges around connectivity and infrastructure in some areas, as well as access to suitable home learning environments. Therefore, we are pleased that colleges can continue to offer vulnerable students much-needed restricted access to campus facilities and ongoing support.

"Mental health is another area of concern identified by the Commissioner and, while colleges have put in place additional support for both staff and students, it is clear that further resources are required to ensure the ongoing wellbeing of those in colleges across Scotland.

"Colleges are intrinsic to helping create a fairer society and the sector will continue to ensure that all learners, regardless of age or background, have equal access to education."

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to Editors:**

- Colleges deliver 26% of all higher education in Scotland.
- College is the primary source of post-16 education for those from deprived background, with 32% of full-time students from Scotland's lowest socio-economic quintile.

A copy of the Commissioner's report can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/impact-covid-19-fair-access-higher-education/>

#### **For further information, please contact:**

Joanne Buchan, Communications and Public Affairs Officer:

Tel: 01786 892012

Mobile: 07590 229 707

Email: [joanne.buchan@collegesscotland.ac.uk](mailto:joanne.buchan@collegesscotland.ac.uk)