



Strategic dialogue with individual institutions

- This paper contains the notes of recent strategic dialogue meetings (SDMs) held during phase four.
- The confirmed discussion notes from the following SDMs are presented for information in annexes B and C:
 - Edinburgh's Telford College, held on 10 June 2008 (Annex B); and
 - Coatbridge College, held on 19 June 2008 (Annex C).

Recommendation

- **The Council is invited to note this paper and the accompanying notes of recent strategic dialogue meetings, and agree that they be disclosable.**

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Purpose

- 1 This paper contains the notes of strategic dialogue meetings (SDMs) held during phase four.

Corporate plan implications

- 2 The SDM notes are submitted for Council members' interest, and are consistent with supporting Aim 7, Objective 5: a Council exercising effective strategic leadership working in partnership with the sectors. The Council's corporate plan states that "we will work with colleges and universities to develop the strategic dialogue process with ... individual colleges and universities" (priority action 73).

Background

- 3 Strategic dialogue meetings (SDMs) were developed in response to Council's wish to include individual engagements with colleges and universities in our strategic dialogue process. **Annex A** lists the SDMs which have taken place so far during the third and fourth phases.

Note of recent SDMs

- 4 The confirmed discussion notes from the following SDMs are presented for information in **Annexes B and C**:
 - Edinburgh's Telford College, held on 10 June 2008 (Annex B); and
 - Coatbridge College, held on 19 June 2008 (Annex C).

Recommendations

- 5 **The Council is invited to note this paper and the accompanying notes of recent strategic dialogue meetings, and agree that they be disclosable.**

Financial implications

- 6 The costs of supporting this process have been allowed for within the Council's existing operational plan.

Further information

- 7 Further information is available from John Stout, Policy Officer (tel: 0131 313 6529; email: jstout@sfc.ac.uk).

Strategic dialogue meetings with individual institutions – Phases 3 and 4

Institution	Date	Team Leader	Member	Member	Member
2007					
John Wheatley College	19 September	Janet Lowe	Lindsay Burley	Jim Martin	
Central College of Commerce	26 September	Tariq Durrani	Peter Holmes	Ian Ritchie	
Moray College	9 October	Sandy Watson	Peter Holmes		
Jewel and Esk Valley College	23 October	Ian Murning	Lindsay Burley	Janet Lowe	
University of Glasgow	8 November	Alan Tripp	Ian Adam	Jim Martin	
Napier University	19 November	Rowena Arshad	Tariq Durrani	Jim Gallacher	
UHI	27 November	Alan Tripp	Janet Lowe	Jim Martin	
Aberdeen College	5 December	John McClelland	Tariq Durrani	Alan Tripp	
West Lothian College	12 December	Sandy Watson	Rowena Arshad	Alan Tripp	
2008					
Glasgow School of Art	30 January	Lindsay Burley	Peter Holmes	Janet Lowe	
University of the West of Scotland	8 February	Ian Adam	Tariq Durrani	Janet Lowe	Dominic McKay
University of Dundee	13 February	Jim Gallagher	Ian Murning	Alan Stannet	
Motherwell College	21 February	Rowena Arshad	Janet Lowe	Paul McKelvie	Alan Tripp
Glasgow Metropolitan College	28 February	Sandy Watson	Tariq Durrani	Janet Lowe	
University of Edinburgh	5 March	Peter Holmes	Jim Gallacher	Tariq Durrani	Alan Stannet
Elmwood College	7 March	Ian Murning	Rowena Arshad	Paul McKelvie	Alan Tripp
Sabhal Mor Ostaig	25 March	Sandy Watson	Lindsay Burley	Jim Gallacher	
North Highland College	8 April	Jim Gallacher	Ian Adam	Lindsay Burley	
Langside College	14 May	Sandy Watson	Paul McKelvie	Alan Stannett	
Stow College	2 June	Alan Stannett	Tariq Durrani	Alan Tripp	Dominic McKay
Edinburgh's Telford College	10 June	Jim Martin	Tariq Durrani	Ian Murning	
North Glasgow College	11 June	Lindsay Burley	Peter Holmes	Alan Stannett	
Coatbridge College	19 June	Ian Adam	Jim Martin	Sandy Watson	
Langside College	14 May	Sandy Watson	Paul McKelvie	Alan Stannett	

Institution	Date	Team Leader	Member	Member	Member
Stow College	2 June	Alan Tripp	Tariq Durrani		
Edinburgh's Telford College	10 June	Jim Martin	Tariq Durrani	Ian Murning	
North Glasgow College	11 June	Lindsay Burley	Peter Holmes	Alan Stannett	
Coatbridge College	19 June	Ian Adam	Jim Martin	Sandy Watson	
Inverness College	8 Sept	Jim Gallacher	Jim Martin	Sandy Watson	
The Open University	11 Sept	Peter Holmes	Tariq Durrani	Paul McKelvie	

Note of a strategic dialogue meeting between Edinburgh's Telford College and the Scottish Funding Council on 10 June 2008

Introduction

- 1 This is a brief overview of the dialogue and does not cover all topics discussed. Neither does it represent a set of agreed actions, since it is not the purpose of strategic dialogue meetings to commit either the Council or the institution on specific matters. Throughout the meeting, but principally under the first three headings below, the Council team and the institution's team discussed the overall strategic direction of the college and the challenges facing it and, in a number of instances, associated challenges for the Council. A list of persons who attended can be found at the end of this note.

The institution's approach to governance

- 2 The Chair of the College's Board of Management gave an overview of governance arrangements in the College which he believed were working well.
- 3 The Board is committed to the delivery of good governance and has recently commissioned the independent Secretary to the Board, a partner in Brodies LLP, to undertake a comprehensive review of all the College's governance arrangements to reduce the amount of documentation and ensure that arrangements are in line with best practice. The College has provided additional resources to ensure that this process is effective.
- 4 The recruitment of Board members is an open and transparent process. Succession planning is given a high priority by the Board in the context of a rolling programme of retiral and recruitment. The College therefore knows which skills gaps to target when advertising for new Board members. The Board also pays constant attention to the boundary between strategic and operational management, while accepting that it can never be defined precisely, and has given a high priority to the College's strategic plan.
- 5 The College is aware of the importance of Continuing Professional Development for Board members with briefing sessions held before every Board meeting. The College keeps its Committee structure under review, holding to the position that most detailed Board work

should be delegated to Committees. Individual Board members are also encouraged to contribute, based on their own knowledge, skills and expertise, to relevant functions of the College. The College is currently working to align the Board and staff self-evaluation and development procedures.

- 6 The Chair noted the pressures on Board members, particularly the time commitments required to be effective and accountable, heightened by the excessive guidance from Government. Consequently the issue of non-remuneration of Board members was a growing issue and members of the Councils present concurred.

The institution's strategic direction

- 7 The Principal described the College's strategic direction. The 2008-11 strategic plan is currently in final draft form. The Principal referred to the College's mission "*Our staff help people change lives through learning*". Linking skills and employment is a key element of the College's strategy and supports both economic development and social inclusion. The College is aware of the importance of the ongoing development of the curriculum to ensure that it continues to be relevant and has aspirations to increase levels of participation in College programmes at the expense of full-time in wSUMs terms.
- 8 The College also highlighted its commitment to be at the forefront of the local community. The choice of location of the new campus was important and the building is viewed as a community resource. The College sees its role in the immediate community as a force for social and economic regeneration as much as provider of education and training. The Chair emphasised the importance of maintaining contact with local developers in further influencing the Waterfront Development.
- 9 The College's strategic direction is driven by partnership and innovation. It recognises that the move to the new campus was a huge undertaking but considers that it provides a cutting edge working environment, confirmed during the HMIe Review, which enables all staff to maximise their contribution to the College's success. At the same time, the College acknowledges that change management can be challenging but sees no reason not to seek to innovate and seek out best practice. The College has ambitions to develop residences and see businesses operating out of the college. The College also has plans to further develop its commercial activities and reduce its reliance on public funding as far as possible.

- 10 The College aims to become a world class learning and teaching organisation by 2015 and has established a series of world class performance indicators against which the College will measure its quality and achievements and through which aims to achieve world class recognition. HMIE reports have provided positive external validation while the Board receives annual reports on quality enhancement from the executive. It was also noted that less formal benchmarking activity takes place. To pursue its aims of achieving world-class status, the Council team suggested that the College considers accreditation by independent organisations such as EFQM.

Skills Strategy (topic selected by the college)

- 11 Jim Galloway (board member) outlined the College's skills strategy. The College is committed to the implementation of the Scottish Skills Strategy and recognises its role as a key delivery partner in the Skills Agenda for Edinburgh. Specifically, the College is a key partner in the City's Employability Strategy "Joined up for Jobs" and the Principal sits on the Strategic Management Group representing the Lothian Colleges. The "Joined up for Jobs" strategy aims to assist unemployed people, low income workers as well as employers.
- 12 The College is also a partner with the Council on employer-facing services including the Edinburgh Waterfront Partnership Accord, Jobzone Plus and the Academy at St James Centre. The College has established a formal partnership with the Council's Construction Academy to provide a new Construction Skills Centre of Excellence. It is envisaged that this partnership will provide a one-stop shop for construction training needs within the city and promote career opportunities within the construction industry.
- 13 The College expressed concern that the Council did not link its grant-in-aid decisions to skills shortages and skills gaps or national priorities despite the existence of the Skills Committee.
- 14 The College's links with employers and economic agencies ensure that the College contributes to the development of the local economy and employment market. Developing the employability agenda is a key aspect of the College's strategy and there is clear evidence of a considerable volume of activity in this area.

Discussion with students at the college

- 15 The Council team met with a cross-section of students who commented positively on their experience and agreed that the College

had made a real difference in developing their potential and enhancing career plans. Students considered that support from the College's staff was of a high standard and that good careers advice was provided.

- 16 The students were also very positive about the facilities at the new campus, in particular access to IT facilities and the improved student social space. The students raised concerns regarding the timetabling and allocation of rooms though they acknowledged that this is a complex issue which is being addressed by the College and that this session had seen an improvement on the previous one.

Discussion with staff at the college

- 17 The Council team met with a cross-section of the College's staff. The staff, similar to the students, were appreciative of the facilities at the new campus. In particular, they commented that IT facilities are excellent while there has been improved dialogue between staff now that they are all located in the same building. However, the staff raised issues concerning the open plan nature of the new building and 'hot-desking' arrangements. In particular, they commented that there was a lack of space and storage facilities while there were problems with temperature control and air-flow.
- 18 While staff were supportive of the board's strategic nature, they considered that there was scope for improvement in the transparency of decision making. They considered that the College's consultative processes were good but highlighted that there are no checks to ensure that strategies are being implemented. Staff also raised concerns in relation to the timetabling and allocation of rooms.

Collaboration (topic selected by the Council)

- 19 Collaboration is a key element of the College's strategy and the College highlighted a range of activities. The discussion focused on local collaborative projects taking place through the Edinburgh & Lothian Colleges Group where the colleges seek to work together for the benefit of learners and economic development on a non-competitive basis. Benchmarking groups have been established to exchange knowledge of best practice and performance at institutional level. Collaborative examples include marketing and curriculum mapping activities, and the Staff Development Group. The College considers that there is scope for more efficient use of resources by

promoting collaborative external ICT projects proactively, funded initially through the SFC.

- 20 Significant collaboration also takes place with higher education institutions and the College has established good articulation agreements with Napier University though it was acknowledged that there is scope for further development in this area, in particular through the provision of guaranteed progression.
- 21 The Construction Skills Centre brings together the City Council's and the College's activities while the College works with employers and training providers in developing training and education provision which meets employment sector needs at local and national level. The College is also continuing to develop strong community links with other local organisations and agencies.

Concluding remarks

- 22 Both parties agreed that these discussions had been stimulating and enlightening. The Council team agreed that it had learned more about the college's strategic aspirations and appreciated the positive responses from the college's team during the discussions. The Council team also shared the feedback received during the discussion with the students and staff.

Participants:

College:

Board of Management:

Ed Weeple, Chair, Board of Management

Dave McDougall, Vice Chair, Board of Management

Jim Galloway, Board Member

Senior Management Team:

Ray Harris, Principal

Greg Irving, Depute Principal

Scottish Funding Council:

Jim Martin, Council Member (Team Leader)

Professor Tariq Durrani, Council Member

Ian Murning, Council Member

Riona Bell, Director of Funding

Andrew Millar, Senior Financial Analyst, GMAP Directorate

Note of a strategic dialogue meeting between Coatbridge College and the Scottish Funding Council on 19 June 2008

Introduction

- 1 This is a brief overview of the dialogue and does not cover all topics discussed. Neither does it represent a set of agreed actions, since it is not the purpose of strategic dialogue meetings to commit either the Council or the institution on specific matters. Throughout the meeting, but principally under the first three headings below, the Council team and the institution's team discussed the overall strategic direction of Coatbridge College and the challenges facing it. A list of persons who attended can be found at the end of this note.

The institution's approach to governance

- 2 The Chair described how the governance arrangements have developed following a review of governance against the ASC Guide for Board Members, and how the Board has led the College in self evaluation, which is now embedded throughout the College.
- 3 The Board has a total of 14 members. There are currently two vacancies. Historically, advertising for Board members has not been successful in attracting interest. However, recently three new members have been recruited through a successful advertising campaign which the College believes reflects its ever increasing reputation. Most of the new members live and work in the local area. The Chair recognised that there is an issue of gender balance on the Board.
- 4 The quality of information going to the Board and its Committees, both financial and non-financial, has improved significantly.
- 5 The Principal described how the College's staff are fully engaged in quality. The College is working to an agreed set of quality targets at every level which are monitored and reviewed by the Principal and reported on to the Board. The progress towards the targets is also reviewed by an effective student affairs committee.

The institution's strategic direction

- 6 The Chair of the board described the college's strategic direction.

- 7 At meetings, the Board does not monitor progress against the strategic plan itself, but focuses on set key targets. The sub-committees of the Board focus on more of the detail included in the plan which relates to their specific Committee areas. The plan is updated every year and there are more detailed operational plans that feed into the strategic plan.
- 8 A major part of the College's strategy is its estates plan. The staff have had a significant input to the project design. A manager with experience of the similar estates development undertaken by Cardonald College has been appointed as the Project Sponsor.
- 9 Other areas of the College's strategy discussed were: community planning; schools/college partnership; the focus on supporting employer engagement; and successfully working with local businesses to provide tailored business solutions.

Strategic growth and the schools/college partnership

- 10 The Principal described how the Lanarkshire colleges' strategic growth project has been successful. The continuing pressures on the College's capacity were described as:
 - expanding demand from schools from both within and outwith the College's catchment area;
 - as a result of a community learning gap analysis, the College has identified a demand for and is putting in place a full-time community programme;
 - the additional costs of training and development of staff to equip them with the skills to specifically address the needs of hard-to-reach learners; and
 - the College's involvement in community development programmes, although the plan is to try and get as many of the partners as possible to off-set the costs.

The Principal spoke about the MC² agenda within the North Lanarkshire area and the closely-related schools / college partnership activities. North Lanarkshire Council's strategy is not to offer their pupils a vocational experience at College but to deliver College courses within the school. This requires careful management of staff

utilisation and is challenging for the College staff working in a school environment.

- 11 Specifically, the College suggested that the Council gives consideration to making more use of targeted distributions of funds for specific purposes. The College believes greater use of such an approach would increase the impact of the Council's funding and ensure that is directed at areas and issues of greatest need.

Discussion with students at the college

- 12 The Council team met with a cross-section of students. The students were extremely enthusiastic and highlighted the following as some of the reasons why they chose to study at the College: excellent reputation for courses in the areas they wanted to study; good facilities and student support; good opportunities resulting from studying at the College; and flexible nursery provision for the their children.
- 13 Most of the students would recommend studying at the College to others. However, there was some concern about the closure of the theatre for drama students, due to accessibility and Health and Safety issues, and the impact of that on practical experience. One student was hoping to go on to study an HND in drama, but is considering applying to another college because of this issue.

Discussion with staff at the college

- 14 The Council team met with a cross-section of staff. The staff were also enormously enthusiastic, highly motivated and had a great pride in the College. The staff highlighted the following as reasons why they enjoy working there: student success; successful external partnerships; input to the design of the estates project; and encouragement to suggest new income sources to support areas of learning they couldn't otherwise afford.
- 15 Most of the staff were frustrated by the limit on funded activity in relation to areas which could be expanded considerably to meet significant demand.

Collaboration

- 16 The Chair stated that any proposal for collaborative activity is considered by the College's Board and management with the best interests of the students in mind.

- 17 The Lanarkshire colleges work together on academic collaboration through a forum which includes the following colleges: Coatbridge, Cumbernauld, South Lanarkshire and Motherwell. The colleges involved in the forum work hard to recognise each others' strengths and weaknesses. Each college excels in different subject areas and focuses on those areas to avoid overlap.
- 18 The main barrier to academic collaboration between the Lanarkshire colleges is public transport links. These need to be developed to allow students to travel easily between the colleges in the Lanarkshire area.
- 19 The Principal described closer collaboration with the university sector. The College is working with Glasgow Caledonian University and University of the West of Scotland. Through partnership working, the College now offers an HND that articulates to a degree which the students can study without having to leave the College.

Concluding remarks

- 20 Both parties agreed that these discussions had been stimulating and enlightening. The Council team agreed that it had learned more about the college's strategic aspirations and appreciated the positive responses from the college's team during the discussions. The Council team also shared the feedback received during the discussions with the students and staff.

Participants:

College:

John Gray, Chair of the Board of Management
Paul Gilliver, Board Member
David Craig, Board Member
John Doyle, Principal
Derek Banks, Director of Financial Management

Scottish Funding Council:

Ian Adam, Council Member (Team Leader)
Jim Martin, Council Member
Sandy Watson, Council Member
Martin Fairbairn, Director of Governance and Management: Appraisal and Policy (GMAP)

Claire Taylor, Financial Analyst, GMAP and Responsible Officer
Dorothy Carson, Financial Analyst, GMAP and Observer

Students:

Sinead McLaughlin, Administration Information Technology (Student President)

Alison Fleming, Science (Vice President)

Ashley Moreland, Makeup Artistry

Brian Patton, Childcare

John Cassidy, Acting and Performance

Staff:

Donna Brogan, Lecturer, Hairdressing

Jennifer Lowe, Senior Lecturer, Dental

Ian Bell, Senior Lecturer, Auto mechanic

Marion McCloskey, Lecturer, Make-up artistry

Rachel Mills, Finance Manager

Shona Pettigrew, Funding Officer

Sarah-Jane Rothwell, Senior Lecturer, Performing Arts