

College Post-Merger Evaluation Report

May 2016

DUNDEE AND ANGUS COLLEGE

SFC post-merger evaluation of the college mergers that took place during the academic year 2013-14

In autumn 2015 the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) began a round of post-merger evaluations of the colleges that merged in the academic year 2013-14. In most cases these evaluations are scheduled to take place two years after the merger.

We are making the outcome of the evaluations available on the SFC website. The first two evaluations were completed in January 2016 and the final evaluation within this tranche of mergers will be June 2016. As new reports are completed they are added to the website.

SFC wrote to the colleges concerned in July 2015 to explain how SFC would carry out the evaluations and what was expected from the colleges. We noted that in carrying out the evaluations across the sector SFC would pay particular attention to the Audit Scotland Good Practice Guide: [Learning the lessons of public body mergers](#).

Colleges are responsible for the implementation of their merger and need to be able to demonstrate the delivery of benefits and performance improvements for all stakeholders including students, staff and employers as outlined in their original merger proposals. The purpose of the merger evaluation is to provide evidence of progress in delivering the intended high level benefits of the merger and to identify lessons learned that support further organisational development and wider learning for the sector.

SFC recognises that good governance and leadership and a culture that is supportive of change and innovation within the merged college are also critical elements in delivering a successful merger. The post-merger evaluation will seek to consider the impact of these elements on the implementation and success of the merger.

Key steps in the post-merger evaluation process are:

- Self-evaluation report submitted by the college.
- SFC review of evidence (including performance indicators).
- SFC arranges discussion sessions/meetings with students, staff, senior managers, the Board of Management and other key stakeholders.
- SFC prepares the formal post-merger evaluation report.

Self-evaluation report submitted by the college

SFC requires that each college submits a self-evaluation at the start of the process. The self-evaluation report should include an assessment of merger benefits and outcomes that have been achieved, developments that have still to be implemented and other relevant information.

SFC review of evidence (including PIs)

SFC reviews and evaluates existing information and data that we have regarding the merger implementation and the colleges' operations through ongoing SFC engagements, including the Outcome Agreement process, and through governance, financial health and quality monitoring. Evidence from Education Scotland external reviews, annual engagement visits and other relevant quality work also provide SFC with a source of information for the evaluation.

SFC discussions/meetings with key stakeholders

As part of this process SFC seeks feedback and views on the success of the merger from a range of stakeholders including teaching and support staff, students, trade union representatives, the students' association and external stakeholders as appropriate through a series of discussion meetings. SFC will then meet with the College's senior management team and with its Board of Management.

SFC prepares the formal post-merger evaluation report

SFC prepares a formal post-merger evaluation report, taking account of all the evidence, feedback and discussions, which is agreed by the Council Board member leading the evaluation. This is then shared with the Scottish Government and copied to the college prior to being published on the SFC website.

SFC evaluation report on the merger to form Dundee and Angus College

Background

1. On 1 November 2013, Dundee College and Angus College merged to form Dundee and Angus College. Prior to the decision to merge by the Boards of the legacy colleges, there was a significant level of opposition to the merger from within the Angus region who felt that the merger would be detrimental to learners and stakeholders. An effective Partnership Board was established, led by the then Chair of Dundee College supported by the Vice Chair of Angus College. Its membership included equal representation of the Board and SLT from both colleges as well as student and staff representatives from both the colleges. The meetings were attended and observed by two members of the SFC executive.
2. The merger proposal for Dundee and Angus College proposed to deliver:
 - An enhanced curriculum providing a range of provision opportunities at most SCQF levels.
 - Increased progression and articulation links within the region and surrounding areas.
 - Consistently delivered student services and a new dedicated Students' Association with one FT president and three PT vice presidents.
 - A resilient, financially secure college.
 - An ability to support resource intensive areas of provision such as low volume courses and/or specialist provision.
 - Investments in ICT, library facilities and estates.
 - Harmonisation of terms and conditions and a commitment to increase CPD programmes and opportunities for staff.
3. Education Scotland undertook an external review of the college in June 2014 and this concluded that the college has in place effective arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders. This judgement means that, in relation to quality assurance and enhancement, the college is led well, has sufficiently robust arrangements to address any identified minor weaknesses, and is likely to continue to improve the quality of its services for learners and other stakeholders. This was a very positive report and it is worth highlighting that this review happened very early on in the merger implementation process. There was one point for further action which was that the college should ensure arrangements to support teaching staff to reflect on and evaluate teaching practice to ensure they are consistent and effective.

4. The early post-merger evaluation was in September 2014. This was slightly later than six months post-vesting. This was to enable the college to focus on the Education Scotland external review. The initial post-merger evaluation concluded that progress with the merger was, at that point, very positive, especially in relation to communication and support provided to students and staff by the then Principal, Christina Potter and her SLT which included a Deputy Principal who was subsequently promoted to the Principal role. This strength was also identified at the pre-merger evaluation in relation to the joint messaging of both Principals of the legacy colleges.
5. The staff and students interviewed at the time of the six month evaluation were very positive about the merger and they were all aware of the 'business as usual' strategy adopted by the college from vesting day. They felt that this was the correct approach. Our discussions with staff and student groups at that time highlighted two potential issues that the SFC team discussed with the Board and SLT:
 - Consistent concerns over the implementation of new ICT systems and the development of new corporate policies over the preceding summer months which were being implemented at the time of the evaluation.
 - Staff concerns on the impact of increased expectations regarding roles and responsibilities and potential higher levels of stress.
6. The merger, at that point, was felt to be exemplary and SFC was confident that the issues identified were being addressed.

Evaluating the success of the merger

Efficiencies and benefits of scale

7. One of the driving forces of the College merger programme was to make sector wide efficiencies that will allow Colleges to benefit from greater scale and being (in most cases) the sole College education provider in their region. It was then expected that this would have positive impacts for learners resulting from the reduced duplication of provision and competition between neighbouring Colleges, as well as financial savings that could be directed towards learning. By making better use of their combined estates, facilities and staff we would expect that a merged College would be in a better position to focus on front-line delivery coupled with stronger and more effective regional engagement.
8. Two years on from the point of merger Dundee and Angus College has achieved integration of all curriculum, service and support areas of the legacy colleges without any detriment to the standard of service provided to their staff, learners or external partners. In their self-evaluation report, the college confirmed the following efficiencies and benefits of scale:

- Providing a one-stop link with schools and universities for improved transition and articulation arrangements.
 - Creating a cohesive and concentrated focus on the economic and workforce development needs of the region.
 - Facilitating the development of improved new courses based on the wider skills base available and increased range of staff development opportunities.
 - Providing a much enhanced learner experience through the creation and development of the Students' Association, Sports Union and Learner Engagement Team.
 - Improved business process and systems that support learners.
9. Both the Board and the SLT felt that the merger had been a success and that it had brought significant student and regional benefits which are outlined later in this report. There were significant savings, as discussed later in this paper. They also reported that the financial context within which they operate is now quite different to what it had been pre-merger due to ONS and ongoing financial restraints.
10. The college has invested significantly in the estate at the Arbroath campus including spaces for the students to socialise and study. There has also been an investment in the ICT capacity of that campus. These investments began at the start of the merger and have been ongoing. It is clear to SFC that this investment results directly from the merger. However, we are becoming increasingly concerned over estates issues at the Kingsway campus.
11. Almost all the post-merger sessions referred to the need for the College Board to invest in the Kingsway Campus, particularly in relation to the Engineering block. Students complained about a lack of heating and leaking roofs. The SFC executive would like to point out that although there is a need to invest in parts of this campus, the campus also benefits from excellent resources such as the training restaurant and The Space (the Scottish School of Contemporary Dance). The Principal and senior team have highlighted their awareness of the need for investment in the Kingsway campus and the College are in discussion with SFC with regard to potential redevelopment options. The Board also strongly supported the finding that parts of Kingsway require investment.

Improved outcomes for students

12. It is worth noting that since the merger Dundee and Angus College has significantly improved its Performance Indicators and as a joint college they now have the highest FTFE successful completion rates of any college region. This also applies to the successful completion rates of their students from the 10% most deprived communities. In addition to this over 94% of their learners that complete their courses achieve a positive destination and it has increased

the number of its learners articulating with advanced standing from 428 in 2012-13 to 523 in 2014-15. The college reports that this would not have been possible as two smaller colleges.

13. The college has also increased its student activity since the merger due to in-year allocations from SFC and could deliver a higher credit target due to increasing demand for learning.
14. Because of the merger, the college has widened its curriculum offer and it has significantly expanded its school links. Staff also highlighted examples of the more flexible benefits of the larger institution such as students having opportunities to choose between campuses if courses are full.
15. During our post-merger sessions, staff and students pointed to the work of the Learner Engagement Team (LET) as a particular example of success post-merger. This team provides students with additional curriculum experiences such as employability or volunteering. They also build up a profile for students to use when they leave college. The LET is an award winning initiative for the college.
16. Similarly, the Sports Union is a new development since the merger which is led by a dedicated Sports and Wellbeing Officer in partnership with the Students' Association. The work of the Sports Union is now embedded and recognised as part of the new culture across all the three campuses and the students and the staff both point to it as a key post-merger success.
17. Staff felt that the student voice was stronger because of the merger and that students were more involved in additional activities across the college. The SFC felt that this was being positively encouraged by all staff and that there was a step change in the awareness and involvement of class representatives and the feedback systems in place were now more sophisticated and consistent than they had been at the initial post-merger evaluation stage.
18. During the sessions with teaching staff, the SFC executive was impressed with the high levels of autonomy given to the teaching staff to enable them to be innovative in their teaching practices and styles. Staff also reported that they felt that their skills and knowledge have increased since the merger. Both teaching and support staff also reflected on the lost experience at the college due to the number of people who have taken VS and left. However, other staff outlined the benefits of this in that it enabled them to grow as professionals or "step up" as some people referred to it and in some cases achieve a promotion.
19. Although the majority of the discussions in relation to student outcomes were positive, the post-merger evaluation did uncover three main issues for further discussion with the Board and the SLT, these were:

- Some isolated reports from students on a lack of innovation in teaching approaches.
 - High levels of workload and therefore possible stress for some academic staff.
 - A need for improved CPD for new lecturers from a non-academic background.
20. These are detailed below alongside the responses sought from the college Board and SLT. The SFC is satisfied with the responses but will continue to monitor these areas through the Outcome Agreement approach.
21. During the post-merger sessions, the SFC team noted that students' views, particularly at the Gardyne campus, on their teacher's lecturing styles were mixed with some identifying excellent areas of innovation and practice such as the sports team and others outlining concerns over outdated knowledge, methods and practices. That said, the majority of students we met could confirm that when they needed support they could identify staff members who could help them, and a significant number of students were also highly complementary about their lecturers.
22. In both cases, the Board and SLT were concerned over this finding, even in relation to a small number of students, and they outlined the significant efforts that go into monitoring teaching practices including observation and managerial scrutiny of department PIs coupled with ongoing CPD investment and support from their Leading and Learning Academy. During the Board session, the Principal also outlined his intention (following two Senior manager posts in HR and Estates becoming vacant) to recruit a Vice Principal for Finance and a Vice Principal for Curriculum. Part of the VP for Curriculum's role would be to ensure that teaching standards were consistently high across the college. The SFC team also recognises that their evaluation only covered a snapshot of students and given the PI levels of the college and the efforts put in to ensure all students receiving high teaching standards. We are satisfied with this response.
23. Another issue raised by both the staff (including support staff) and students related to the high workloads experienced by academic staff and the potential impact that this could have on their wellbeing and stress levels. A particular issue from the staff unions perspective was the reduction in part time staff. The SFC executive feels that this issue is being addressed by a proposed restructure to reconsider the post of Academic Head which was put in place to assist the implementation of the merger. The Outcome Agreement Manager was aware of this in advance of the meeting. This process is currently out for consultation

with staff and it was recognised by the staff that we met that the management team had recognised the issue and were trying to address it.

24. In both cases, the Board and SLT recognised this issue and they confirmed that a restructure is already in place to address it. In addition to this they outlined that the college has put in place Occupational Health support for staff and will be evaluating the impact of this. They are also following up comprehensively on the outcomes of staff surveys to supplement the information available and better direct actions.
25. It is clear that staff welfare is seen as a priority for both the Board and the SLT. It was suggested that this issue of increased workload and related stress may relate more to the current financial context and the need for financial savings since the merger rather than an implication of the merger implementation process. For this reason, SFC are content that the college is doing everything it can to mitigate stress levels within their staff cohort.
26. Some staff suggested that further CPD is required to build up teaching skills as some new staff had come from an industry rather than a teaching background. It was also recognised that these staff brought significant new levels of knowledge and expertise into the organisation too. We have sought and received confirmation from the SLT at the college that an embedded CPD programme leading to a TQFE qualification is in place at the college and it is worth noting that at no point did the numbers of academic staff with a TQFE qualification fall below 90%. Again we are satisfied with this response.

Improved delivery of skills at a regional level

27. The post-merger sessions outlined that the merger had had significant benefits to the region as it had enabled the Local Authorities, especially Angus Council, to engage with a wider range of stakeholders due to the excellent employer, education and public sector links held by the college. It was also reported that the college is a more significant “player” within the region and is invited to more influential regional groups such as the Board of Scottish Enterprise and has been invited to Chair Local Authority Committees. The college’s self-evaluation report outlines many other examples of their growing regional role since the merger, for example they now host and chair the Dundee Economic Summit and that they have set up Scotland’s first coding academy which brings together large and small employers in the digital industries to upskill their staff and students.
28. The evaluation outlined that the wider regional remit of the college, and reduced competition, had enabled them to engage better with local employers and that they were doing this on a key sector skills basis. To date they have held stakeholder events with both the Food and Drink Industry and with a range of

accountancy firms. The Board informed us that the college had also invested in an independent survey of employer views of the college. This was largely positive and identified the larger regional college as having stronger engagement with businesses. Staff also outlined that this enhanced employer engagement role had huge benefits for students and student services and they pointed to the streamlined health care provision available across all three campuses as a particular example of this.

29. As outlined in their self-evaluation report, the college also hosts the Developing the Young Workforce Regional project and it was the primary driver of the successful national bid in 2015. Since the merger they have also developed a bespoke Incubator Facility offering new entrepreneurs the opportunity to establish and grow their business within a supported environment where they can access specialist support and high quality facilities.
30. More recently, the college has arranged a session on the Waterfront Development to enable them to position themselves in a way to enable the maximum employment benefits for the area by providing employers with the skilled workforce they require. They have invited SFC to attend this. The Board outlined that they felt the college's capacity and ability to respond was crucial to the success of the Waterfront development as the skills required were areas that fitted with the college's curriculum portfolio. However, they were concerned that the capacity of the college due to the credit target allocated to them by SFC may limit their ability to fully meet the projected demand for skills.

Financial efficiencies and savings

31. Prior to the merger, the financial position of both colleges was considered to be healthy. However, at the session with the Board and the SLT, the college reported that operating within the finances now allocated to the college was extremely challenging. This has been overcome for this academic year due to the college receiving additional provision which has increased income and supported the college to fund the national pay awards. It is worth outlining that the college has excess demand for its places and could deliver a higher credit target – which they wish to do. SFC has encouraged the college to work with their Outcome Agreement Manager to build up a business case to illustrate this in the first instance outlining the evidence to show why the current demographic model is not accurately predicting demand in the Tayside region.
32. The college report that if they cannot secure a more permanent higher credit target they will be forecasting a £1m deficit position for next year. They report that this is not due to the merger but is due to the impact of ONS, higher National Insurance costs and pension costs.

33. The college has put in place an initiative called Project Earn and Save to help them overcome this possible deficit. This does not factor in any future pay awards for staff. They are doing this in full consultation with their staff. They report that although the merger has brought savings due to a reduction of staff, it also brought an increase in costs such as harmonisation of salaries and conditions, travel and the modernisation of systems. Furthermore, the projected deficit position also means that the college is deferring further investment in areas such as ICT. That said, they also outline that they have an opportunity to raise income through their enhanced commercial offering. However, the college also outlined that its ability to respond to possible commercial opportunities is hampered by a lack of resilience in the college due to the need for academic staff to work their maximum hours within their contracts.
34. The support and academic staff that the SFC team met with were aware of Project Earn and Save and teaching staff in particular raised some discomfort with the push for the college to save money and they felt that this had detracted from the focus on the student experience and learning. This perception was confirmed to a certain extent by some of the students we met who were very aware of cost cutting exercises at the college and the pressures placed on academic staff to reduce costs.
35. The table below demonstrates the savings made by the college since the merger.

Dundee and Angus College merger savings	
Staff savings	
FTE Pre-merger	728
VS departures (FTE)	54
Other departures (FTE)	0
FTE at July 2015	674
Total staff cost savings	
	£5,362,000
Other savings to date	
	£300,000
Total savings to July 2015	
	£5,662,000

Effective leadership and governance

36. The governance structure of the new College was established early in the merger process and it is a gender balanced Board. The post-merger evaluation concluded that the leadership and governance element of the merger was a particular asset to the creation of Dundee and Angus College and this finding is consistent with the outcomes of our pre-merger and initial merger evaluations. However, it should be outlined that the move to a regional board was not straight forward for the new college as issues arose through the Scottish Government's appointment arrangements which led to three different Board Chairs in the space of six months which was followed by new revised membership arrangements. Only four of the current eighteen members remain in place from the Board formed on vesting day.
37. Both the Board and the SLT reported that the merger had exceeded their expectations and they now felt that they were a bigger, stronger and more confident college within their region. They also felt that they were much further on at the two year point than they thought they would have been. It is worth pointing out that this is particularly impressive as the Angus region had been particularly opposed to the initial proposal for a merger. When asked what lay at the heart of this successful transition it was suggested that excellent visible leadership from the legacy colleges – both at Chair and Principal level – during the transition had been key. This was also identified at the six month merger evaluation. The SLT also felt that the Partnership Board drove forward a positive tone and culture and set of attitudes and behaviours for the new college. During the post-merger evaluation the SFC executive also heard reports from both staff and students on the Principal's and SLT's highly collegiate and consultative style which appears to have further assisted and grown a positive culture within the new college.

Communications and engagement

38. In their self-evaluation the college outlined the work they have done to measure employee engagement. There are two particular indexes which are worthy of mentioning, the engagement Index and the happiness index.
- The engagement index is calculated from the responses to all questions except “In general, I feel happy when I am at work”. The guidance states that an index of less than 50 should be cause for concern, while a score of over 75 can be considered as having engaged employees overall. The college score 68 with no department scoring less than 50 and 11 departments scoring 70 or above, with 5 being over 75. The highest score was 88.
 - The happiness Index is calculated from the response to the question In general, “I feel happy when I am at work”. No department scored less than 50.
39. During our visits, staff outlined that the college was highly collaborative and collegiate and encouraged you to identify new ideas and approaches. This was exemplified through the Executive’s Showcase. The Executive’s Showcase was described as an opportunity to share good work. Staff explained that a lot of effort went into delivering the showcase events and that the Principal and Senior team all attend. Overall staff felt that they could influence the direction of the college.
40. Both the staff and the students felt that internal communications were excellent and listed examples of sessions with the executive, blogs, networking and social events. The students and staff also felt that the IT facilities i.e. intranets/portals etc. were excellent and were well managed, updated and relevant.
41. The session with the staff unions was not as positive as the six-month post-merger evaluation had been but the areas of concerns were not in relation to merger implementation but more related to funding levels and cost savings that resulted in staff pressure particularly affecting teaching staff. The unions were also very concerned about reductions to part time staff. The Principal and senior team noted that this was a regrettable, but inevitable, result of the current funding position.
42. In our meetings at the college, both the unions and the SLT stressed how highly they valued their relationship with the other party and they felt that the relationship was positive. In their self-evaluation the college also outlined their gratitude for the ongoing communications with the unions and they felt that this input and their ideas had helped to inform the merger process and the future college.

Organisational development and culture change

43. Staff outlined that they felt their skills had increased since the merger due to working with new people, taking on new responsibilities, learning new approaches and being part of a bigger institution. On the other hand some staff outlined an increase in bureaucracy since the merger which some felt was perhaps inevitable in a bigger institution.
44. Staff also praised the insight of the Principal to be flexible in building a new culture and allowing difference across the campuses on the understanding that the staff always strived to make the student experience consistent and excellent. Some staff also identified personal examples where the merger had benefited them such as staff who could switch campuses because of the merger where that would be beneficial to them.
45. During our session with the SLT we asked for reasons for the success of the merger beyond the leadership and governance points outlined earlier in this report. There were two additional areas identified which are discussed in more detail below.
 - Teambuilding and Trust – This was primarily built up during the workstreams that were developed to inform the new college approach. These sessions were led by staff for staff but had good visibility from the SLT and the Board as each workstream had a Board Champion. These sessions enabled staff to get to know each other; understand the barriers to be broken down and a realisation of common goals. This was built on after the merger through the development of Rapid Improvement Events and Executive Showcases which built on this work and further encouraged team approaches. It also supported a culture of new ideas using the best approaches of the past to build the right approach for the new college.
 - Investment in people and culture – The SLT outlined a set of activities and strategies that had been used to help build a positive culture. This included a flexible approach to campus locations; a flexible approach to cultural norms at each campus – i.e. each campus does not have to do things identically but the student experience at each campus must be excellent; investment in Organisation Development and good communications. In addition to this, the SLT have supported and encouraged involvement in social events. These social events are well attended and often rely on staff volunteering their input and time. It is suggested that this focus on staff and a willingness to be open to alternative options/ideas has led to a staff cohort who feel well informed and supported and who are key to the future direction and success of the college.

Systems development integration

46. In their post-merger evaluation, the college reported that:
- The integration and development of their systems had focused on the learner experience, with the primary objective to inform, support and enhance their journey from initial enquiry and application all the way through their learning experience to successful achievement.
 - New web based, online systems have been developed that add value to operations, reduce workload and better inform our staff and students. Alongside these developments, the College took the decision to upgrade their student records system which has allowed them to achieve full interoperability between all of their core information systems.
 - Students now have real time access to the information required to support and enhance their learning experience. Growth in the use of the new student information and learning portals MyD&A and MyLearning has steadily increased over the last 2 years and is now regularly accessed by over 96% of learners.
 - A series of staff training opportunities have been running continually throughout the merger implementation process and these have been supplemented by the online video guides available to support the new systems.
 - Innovative use of ICT has supported the creation of a learner engagement app (LEAP) system to manage and track the input and wider skills achievements of learners within these activities. This supports reflection on learning from these events and activities and allows the College to certificate the wider achievement of learners and evidence delivery of the college's D&A Attributes.
 - The merger process provided an opportunity to create a single ICT network domain, which has allowed them to move forward in implementing a virtual desktop environment which will enable staff and students to access directly college information and systems on any smart device at any location.
47. The SFC sessions with support staff were very positive and although the amount of ICT changes, processes and procedures at the start of the merger were identified as a challenge (this was a key finding of the initial merger evaluation) it was outlined that these processes are working really well and have ensured that the college is harmonised, functional and resilient. The insight of the Senior Management team to invest in a Head of ICT post at the beginning of the merger was praised and it was felt that this post was seen as campus neutral which helped build and integrate systems. SFC also asked students about their experiences of the application, induction, support and student support systems and no significant issues were raised.

Student engagement

48. In their self-evaluation the college report that extensive work has been undertaken through the merger to develop the range and impact of learner engagement activities and opportunities across all campuses. They outlined that due to economies of scale they have run large events such as RESPECT me and MOTIVATE me which they report have resulted in an exponential increase in activity, impact and outcomes for learners.
49. The SFC evaluation confirms that view as we heard feedback that student engagement levels are excellent and this is noted in more detail in the section on student outcomes. We are very impressed with the work of the award winning Learner Engagement Team and see the growth of this team and its impact on the college as a significant area of achievement for the new college in terms of building the student experience at college and helping them to build a record of achievement. We are also impressed with the work of the Students' Association, despite the challenges in the current year, and also the development and impact of the Sports Union. It was clear to us that these two areas are a strong part of the student engagement culture of Dundee and Angus College.
50. The members of the Students' Association we spoke to were very positive about the college and the support it received from the Learner Engagement team and indeed from the Principal and SLT. However, during our visit, the Students' Association outlined that they feel that the relationship with the Learner Engagement team can sometimes veer towards more of a line management arrangement rather than allowing the Students' Association to be an autonomous body in its own right. It was also notable that the Students' Association were unaware of the budget allocated to them and which they therefore could not influence and which they felt limited their ability to plan and organise their Association activities.
51. We have sought assurance from the Principal and Senior team that the Students' Association do indeed have a budget and that this is in line with previous years' allocations. They also assure us that this is communicated to the Students' Association and that they receive monthly budget statements which are also accessible to the Vice Presidents online at any time. They are currently discussing how best to support the Students' Association for next Academic Year (AY) including the possibility of introducing elected campaign officers. They also confirmed that they will consider how best to position the role of the Learner Engagement Team alongside the Students' Association to ensure its autonomy. Work is also progressing to improve the accountability of the Students' Association to the wider student body in accordance with the national framework. We also discussed this issue with the Board who are keen to support the Students' Association.

52. The SFC executive feels that these issues, although important to raise, will and can be resolved once a President is in place. However, to ensure we adequately monitor the position, the SFC Outcome Agreement team for the College will offer to meet with the Students' Association later this year, and on an ongoing basis, to clarify if the issues raised during the post-merger evaluation have been addressed.

Financial management

53. Financial management at the college is considered to be strong and they are coping well with the enhanced financial reporting requirements consequent to the re-classification of the College as a public body by the Office for National Statistics. Indeed the college were heavily involved in advising SFC on processes and procedures to support the implementation of this re-classification.

Conclusion

54. SFC considers this merger to have been exemplary in its implementation and we recognise that the college did face its challenges during the merger process and continues to face financial challenges and pressures.
55. It is our view that one of the keys to success was the strength of the leadership of the college coupled with an effective Partnership Board early on which set the tone for the standards expected and the positive collegiate approach adopted throughout. It is also our view that this approach has been further enhanced by the new Principal and his team and has now become part of the culture of the new college. It was also confirmed during our evaluation visit that the new Board sees its role is to constructively challenge the new Principal and his senior team to continue to strive for future successes.
56. Some issues were identified by the SFC team during this latest evaluation which need to be addressed, and these are outlined in this report, but it is the view of SFC that these are best monitored and progressed through the ongoing work of the Outcome Agreement team for the Tayside College Region and that there is no requirement for any further post-merger evaluation.