

College Post-Merger Evaluation Report

June 2016

GLASGOW CLYDE 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 this website.

SFC evaluation report on the merger to form Glasgow Clyde College

Background

1. On 1 August 2013, Anniesland College, Cardonald College and Langside College merged to form Glasgow Clyde College. In August 2014 it became one of the three assigned colleges within Glasgow Region, the others being Glasgow Kelvin College and City of Glasgow College.
2. The college's merger proposal document outlined an ambitious vision for Glasgow Clyde College. The key areas for delivery would be excellence in Learning and Teaching, a revised curriculum offer aligned with economic and skills needs that meets students and employer needs, excellent facilities and high quality learning environments and a renewed focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. The new college would be delivered through building on the strengths of the three partner colleges and streamlining delivery, processes and systems to ensure greater value for the public funds invested. The range of wider benefits which the new college would deliver for students, staff and wider stakeholders included:
 - Prioritising student success flowing from improved student retention and achievement.
 - Offering a relevant broad based curriculum with clear entry points along with new and existing specialisms focusing on health and well-being, creative and culture, technology and finance and business.
 - Improved provision for local communities with clear access points and viable progression routes both within the college and on to other Glasgow colleges.
 - Further work with HE partners to ensure articulation opportunities to degree level study where appropriate.
 - Well-developed employer partnerships to deliver work experience / placements and contributions to curriculum development.
 - Renewed focus on pathways from school to employment with an emphasis on the senior phase delivery and youth employability.
3. The early post-merger evaluation in March 2014 showed that good initial progress had been made in terms of delivering the merger and meeting the objectives for the new college. The Board of the college and SFC at the time recognised that it had been a real challenge (and major achievement) for the college to progress all aspects of merger implementation, adapt to emerging regional issues and challenges including a regional strategic body (GCRB), and also to implement the necessary changes required by ONS all in the same time period.
4. During the discussions with staff we heard about the range of challenges that were experienced early in the merger implementation phase. However we were able to clarify that clearly the college has moved on from this phase but it has taken time to make the full change required.

5. We have continued to be mindful of the unique circumstances the college has been operating in, simultaneously dealing with a merger, regionalisation, reductions in funding and developing and implementing a Glasgow-wide curriculum and estates review. We are aware that some of the issues raised in our discussions with staff and SMT were perhaps more a consequence of ongoing funding constraints or ongoing change across Glasgow Region and the sector more widely rather than attributable to the merger directly. We acknowledge that these issues also impacted on the college in the same timeframe as the merger was being implemented.
6. Although we did not address it directly in the evaluation sessions as the issue was not related to the merger, SFC heard reference made to the challenging circumstances within which the college was working between February 2015 and October 2015. During this time the Principal was suspended. As a result of serious concerns about governance, a Parliamentary Order of 8th October 2015 removed some members of the previous Board and confirmed the appointment of seven new Board members from October 2015 through to the end of September 2016. The new Board approached the Principal in November 2015 and she resumed full responsibilities in December 2015. It was members of this new Board that met with SFC on Tuesday 19 April. Despite this added complexity in governance and management of the college the feedback that we heard in our discussions confirmed that the focus of the college management during this period was clearly on business as usual, prioritising the student experience, supporting staff and leading the college.

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 would allow colleges to benefit from greater scale, reduce 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. Evidence we heard confirmed that the scale of the merged Glasgow Clyde College has allowed significant impact at the regional level and enhanced existing partnerships with employers, national agencies, a wide range of universities, three local Education Authorities and catchment area schools. Glasgow Clyde College now provides just under 50 % of the school / college provision for the Glasgow Region and supports the delivery of approximately 1150 Modern Apprenticeships in a significant number of areas including engineering, construction, business, health, care, life sciences, journalism and textiles.

9. The college reported that it is now the largest provider of vocational pathways in Glasgow working closely with local authority partners and building on well established relationships. There is engagement with over 40 secondary schools across Glasgow, East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire. This enables the Developing Young Workforce portfolio to offer breadth and depth for the benefit of schools and school learners and includes an extensive range of options which would not have been available prior to merger.
10. During our evaluation visits both staff and stakeholders agreed that regional engagement with employers and partners has become significantly more effective since merger and that this is now a major strength of the college. The college uses its scale to ensure it influences decision makers for the benefit of learners. The college has also won a number of recent awards for its partnership working. In the college's Education Scotland Review of November 2014 it was outlined that '*Partnership working is a major strength of the college*'. The Review report went on to say that:

'Staff and learners benefit from a wide range of effective strategic relationships with local and regional stakeholders including universities, local authorities, external agencies, schools and employers. The college contributes at strategic level to the National Health Service (NHS) Greater Glasgow and Clyde Board Education Partnership. This enables the college to maintain an effective strategic contribution to workforce development in the local area.'

11. In their self-evaluation (submitted to SFC in March 2016) the college sets out how resources are now shared across the three legacy campuses. Each of the legacy colleges had access to specialist equipment and expertise which is now available to staff and students more widely on an ongoing basis. Both staff and students also reported that equipment and resources within the college have improved since merger. For example, they told us that the college's libraries have improved, are well-resourced and there is access to a wider range of materials which are well used by students. There are more computers available across all campuses and there has been ongoing investment in equipment across a range of curriculum areas with positive examples provided from engineering, health, sport, hair and beauty.
12. The Glasgow Clyde Education Foundation¹ has also given staff at the college an opportunity to access funds to benefit students and improve equipment and

¹ Prior to the College being reclassified as a central public body by the Office of National Statistics (ONS), an arms-length foundation was set up which is called the Glasgow Clyde Education Foundation (GCEF). This foundation was established as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in January 2014 and received its main tranche of funding of £14.4Million through a Donation Agreement with Glasgow Clyde College in March 2014. A subsequent donation of £600k was made by the College to GCEF in March 2015. The Foundation is a separate independent charitable organisation whose purposes are to enhance the learning experience for students and potential students of Glasgow Clyde College and the communities served by Glasgow Clyde College, by supporting students and the life of the College, by supporting College staff, courses and programmes, and by supporting estates development and sustainable infrastructure.

facilities as well as develop staff. Staff outlined a number of projects which they were involved in that have benefited from Foundation funding.

13. Both teaching and support staff have made good use of opportunities to share, standardise, collaborate and innovate to improve the student experience. A number of positive examples were provided in both the self-evaluation and in the sessions with college staff. Staff highlighted how they are now more likely to engage in cross-campus collaboration with the focus on improving learning and teaching and the student experience. However, this has taken time to develop and establish.

Improved outcomes for students

14. In their merger self-evaluation the college illustrates the steps it has taken to keep the focus on putting the learner at the centre of developments across the college since Vesting Day and is able to provide evidence of how these initiatives are now delivering improved outcomes for students. We subsequently reviewed other sources of evidence including the college's PIs, portfolio information, and its contribution to delivering the targets and aspirations within the Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement, including the implementation of the Curriculum and Estates Plan. As a result we have come to some conclusions about the current and potential future impact on outcomes for students.
15. Students at all campuses commented that they enjoyed studying at the college and universally praised the teaching staff and their commitment to the students. The view held was that staff are very supportive, they care passionately about the quality of the learning and teaching and the experience the students have in college to allow them to succeed. There was consistency in our discussions with staff, students the college Senior Management Team and college Board of Management on how students have benefited as a result of the merger. Further evidence of these benefits are outlined below, including:
 - An extensive but focused curriculum offer with clear pathways.
 - An enhanced learner experience with improved levels of student services and support with a subsequent positive impact on retention and attainment.
 - Improved progression routes and articulation arrangements.
 - Enhanced engagement with employers with more opportunities for workplace experience.

Curriculum coherence

16. The college's self-evaluation report notes that Glasgow as a whole is developing a 'joined up' approach to curriculum planning which is delivering benefits in terms of attainment and progression. The college has been working in collaboration with the other two Glasgow colleges to develop and implement the Glasgow Region Curriculum and Estates Plan 2020 which was endorsed by the GCRB in March 2015

and incorporated into the Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement for 2015-16. The Curriculum Mapping exercise that underpinned this regional activity has been noted as a model of good practice. The curriculum maps developed are already being used extensively, particularly in work with schools, and these will continue to be updated.

17. This work identified the changes required across some curriculum areas within the college, with some subjects growing to meet economic need, while others are likely to shrink. There is now more focus on vocational programmes at the college with a reduction in the provision of Highers programmes. In addition it has moved to provide more provision at SCQF level 4 where gaps were identified and this will enhance progression options for students. These outcomes are all consistent with the original aims outlined in the merger proposal. Alongside this the college will transfer some activity to the City of Glasgow College in 2016-17 and receive some science provision from Glasgow Kelvin College where staff will TUPE transfer to the college.
18. Although it is too early to fully assess the impact of the curriculum changes which are still being implemented the college is certain that the focus on getting the curriculum better aligned with industry and employer needs has been positive and is impacting on success in other areas including community based learning, senior phase provision and progression opportunities. Stakeholder feedback confirmed that they have confidence that the college is placing a strong focus on vocational and employment skills and meeting industry needs and this will help to ensure that students have clear pathways to employment.
19. Staff noted that the curriculum shifts across the college, although an outcome of regional strategy and planning rather than merger directly, have meant further change across the college since 2015 with potential future resource implications. Staff referred to these additional changes as prolonging the change / merger process which has impacted on staff morale to some degree. Although the changes have been considered and communicated over a period of time, teaching staff in some areas affected would have wanted more information about the rationale for the changes.

Single point of access for learners to high quality learning environment

20. The college is now operating from three main campuses in the south and west of the city and is viewed as a college of scale with regional impact but which continues to deliver in its local communities. Students reported that they chose to study at the college because it was the 'local college', and / or because of the known expertise in specific subject areas and the quality of the learning and teaching and the opportunities for workplace experience.
21. Some of the students we spoke with referred to the range of expertise and the excellent lecturing and support staff available at the various campuses and they

were aware of the potential for progression in some subject areas that would not have been possible previously, recognising that this may require a move to a different campus. However, most students tended to view the campus which they first attended as the campus of choice and where they would prefer to complete their study.

22. Stakeholders, particularly schools, community partners and modern apprenticeship employers, have commented favourably on a single point of access for learners across the college footprint, with the ability to access a larger resource in specific subject areas across all campuses. Community provision across the South and West of the city has been increased beyond what the three legacy colleges had previously delivered. The college Estates Strategy seeks to maintain and develop a high quality estate which facilitates an appropriate learner experience in the various subject areas and an effective working environment for staff.

Excellence in L&T

23. Throughout the post-merger phase at Glasgow Clyde College we have had extremely positive feedback about the quality of the Learning and Teaching across the college and the critical role of the teaching and support staff in this delivery. We heard testimonies from many staff and students that confirm that in many instances staff go above and beyond what is formally required. The college's most recent Education Scotland Annual Engagement Visit (AEV) carried out in February 2016 noted that learners fed back that *"overall learners are happy with their experience at college and would recommend the college to others. Many learners identify teaching staff as the biggest strength in the college"*.
24. SFC is clear that Glasgow Clyde College is committed, along with the other two colleges in Glasgow, to improving student retention, attainment and achievement (as evidenced in the Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement). There has been a renewed focus on quality and excellence in learning and teaching – evident through our evaluation and confirmed by Education Scotland reviews and visits.
25. While the further education sector as a whole has seen a reduction in attainment levels at both full time FE (65.9% in 2013-2014 down to 64% in 2014-2015) and full time HE (71.4% in 2013-2014 to 71.3% in 2014-2015), both Glasgow Clyde college and the Glasgow Region as a whole saw improvements in student retention and attainment and Glasgow Clyde College saw increases in both full and part time attainment at further education level, while maintaining attainment levels in excess of the sector average in both full and part time HE provision.
26. In discussion with senior managers SFC asked what had contributed to this improvement in student achievement and attainment. We heard that since merger there has been a renewed focus on understanding where students come from and what their aspirations and goals are at the outset of their learner

experience, for example through developing relationships with schools. This has allowed the college to focus on raising aspiration and ensuring that the curriculum that is planned and delivered offers a clear pathway and progression options that meet students' needs. Student support has also been a key element.

27. We heard feedback which suggested that the roll out and embedding of Student Advice Centres on each campus has enhanced services in academic advice, guidance and welfare matters which has impacted positively on learner success. There is now parity of service provision across campuses. For example, the presence of an Equality and Inclusion team on each site means that students have access to a greater range and variety of mechanisms to support their learning. This and other support services are continuing to improve and standardise student services with the view that best practice is being adopted regardless of which legacy college it may have come from.
28. In the sessions with staff and the Trade Unions we heard concerns expressed about the proportion of existing staff who have achieved the TQFE. New staff coming into the college are unlikely to have this while many of the staff who left prior to the merger were qualified. We were reassured by the senior management that the college continues to prioritise professional development for all staff. While management indicated a wish to extend the number of TQFE places, the Union has a stated preference for the available funding to be used for time remission for staff rather than contributing to expand the number of TQFE places. Investment in enhancing learning and teaching has led the college to embark on a 3 year professional development programme for teaching staff aimed at strengthening learning and teaching through a focused, systematic and structured 12-week professional development programme for existing lecturers. This will equip participants with the knowledge, skills and understanding to reflect on their professional practice and enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching across the college. Professional Development Time in the timetable for teaching staff is new to some staff and has been welcomed.
29. The overarching message from our sessions with staff was that they continue to prioritise the quality of learning and teaching in the college and focus on ways to further enhance the students' learning experience. This was also the opinion of both the college Senior Management Team and college Board of Management. This view is corroborated by the successful Education Scotland Review in November 2014, and the Annual Engagement visit in February 2016, which confirmed that the college was highly effective in all aspects of its learning and teaching.

Progression opportunities

30. During our evaluation visits students and staff confirmed that enhanced opportunities for progression are now in place. For some students this may mean

moving to a different campus within the college to access a higher level of study. In their self-evaluation the college highlighted that it continues to work closely with its key university partners to increase articulation places and to support learners making the transition from college to university.

31. The college has also responded positively to the planning and development of the schools / college senior phase provision across Glasgow City, East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire. It also provided evidence of how it works with community partners to identify and address gaps in provision to provide support and opportunities for young people across the region and how this supports and contributes to progression opportunities.

A strong focus on vocational and employment skills and meeting the needs of industry

32. The college's self-evaluation described the strong working relationships it has with an extensive range of employers across most curriculum areas. This was reinforced by the employers and stakeholders we spoke to on the day. Employers contribute positively to subject content and design across a wide range of programmes, which ensures that the delivery of qualifications meets industry standards. Employers provide guest speakers, work placements and live projects which supports learners to expand their understanding of the workplace. In our stakeholder session employers spoke extremely positively about their relationship with the college and their ability to shape the curriculum to meet the needs of the different economic sectors within the region.
33. A key priority for Glasgow Clyde College is to further develop provision in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and to offer appropriate articulation routes. The college worked with NEF (The Innovation Institute) to develop a STEM Strategy and gain STEM Assured status² in October 2015. This is a respected, external quality mark used by education and training providers. The process was positive and engaged all curriculum areas across the college.
34. We heard positive feedback during the evaluation visits about how the college has continued to invest in high specification and updated equipment to allow students to have the right learning experience to prepare them for employment. Examples of this were in hairdressing and beauty, sports science and also engineering where the investment within the Anniesland campus provided industry-specific equipment which has enabled the delivery of more Modern Apprenticeships.
35. The consensus from stakeholders was that the college places a high priority on employer engagement which is critical in providing students with pathways into employment. As a larger institution the college can now give students more

² STEM Assured is a prestigious external quality mark used by education and training providers as a key differentiator to demonstrate their capability in delivering STEM provision that meets the needs of business and industry – with a framework covering strategy, engagement, delivery, innovation and impact of the college's STEM offer to meet the needs of learners and employers.

meaningful exposure to workplace activity that would not have been available prior to merger.

36. Finally, the results of the first publication of the Scottish Funding Council's College Leaver Destinations report (CLD) for the year 2013-2014 identified that, with an overall response rate of over 80%, 97.6% of respondents for Glasgow Clyde College said they were in a positive destination, either in further study or a job, the highest percentage of all of the Glasgow colleges.

Financial efficiencies and savings – merger costs, pay harmonisation, estimated savings and efficiency savings

37. In the Business Case for Merger, shared with SFC in spring 2013, Anniesland, Cardonald and Langside colleges recognised that the college sector was facing a challenging position ahead and that the coming together of the colleges would allow a sustainable financial position to be reached within two to three years of merger with accounting and cash surpluses generated at that stage and beyond. An ongoing level of operating surplus and cash generation would enable continued investment in teaching and student facilities. Prior to merger the three legacy colleges were considered to be secure. The assumption in the original business case shared with SFC in 2013 was that the total cost of merger would be £9,900,000.
38. SFC offered the colleges merging to form Glasgow Clyde College a total of up to £4.7M from merger implementation funding / transformation funding to support the VS costs outlined and up to £300,000 to support the development of the Students' Association and associated student engagement and representation from AY2013-14. This was in addition to earlier 'enabling' funding of £300,000.
39. As part of the post-merger evaluation Glasgow Clyde College provided a full summary of costs and savings to the end of December 2015 showing the following:
 - The total cost of merger was £9,646,846. Voluntary severance costs totalling £5.6M were almost in line with the Business Case estimate of £5.7M while other merger costs totalled £3,747,132 (see table below).
 - Harmonisation costs to AY15-16 were £1.2M which is line with the business case estimate. The college informed SFC that it was not possible to standardise terms and conditions through one off non-consolidated payments and, as such, recurring costs have had to be absorbed into college ongoing operating costs.
 - A total of 182 staff (155 FTE) have taken VS with a recurrent payroll saving of £6,056,307. This compared to the business case assumption of savings of £5,807,000 (147 FTE). The college confirmed that they approved all VS applications where justified by the business case.
 - Other one-off savings totalled £1,102,000. The business case included an estimated reduction of £211k in non-staff costs, however the college has

exceeded this mainly due to the procurement savings as outlined in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 APUC Benefits Statements.

Other merger costs

Merger project staff costs	243,721
Legal	46,218
Due diligence	56,826
IT	1,898,922
Branding	276,543
Harmonisation	1,189,218
Merger Business Case	19,800
Legacy Colleges Run Off Insurance Cover	15,884
Total	£3,747,132

Total savings

Recurring annual salary savings from VS	£6,056,307
Other savings to date (one off)	
Procurement	£ 850,000
Administration	£ 102,000
ICT Systems Replacement	£ 150,000
Total	£1,102,000
Total savings to July 2015	£7,158,307

Effective leadership and governance

40. A key element of the post-merger evaluation involves taking a view of the effectiveness of the governance and leadership of the college during the implementation phase. In this case the Board that we met with had not been in place during the first two years post-merger. During the early evaluation at Clyde College at six months post-merger the Board was confident that it had established robust governance arrangements to manage the merger process and establish the new college. The South and West Partnership Board handed over smoothly to the Shadow Board in June 2013 with a further transition to the new Board of Management of Glasgow Clyde College on 1 August 2013. Post-Vesting Day the Board, the Principal and the senior management worked effectively to drive forward a range of policies, procedures and processes to enable merger operations to progress.
41. Following the appointment of the Interim Board of Management in October 2015, a Glasgow Clyde College Governance Action Plan was put in place and acted on to

address the governance issues as outlined by the Cabinet Secretary. The current priorities for the Interim Board were to more effectively integrate the separate roles of the Board and the senior executive and provide transparency for staff on the governance of the college.

42. During our evaluation visit the Board members were positive about the success of the merger given the range of issues that had to be addressed and were satisfied that the external evidence confirmed this. Their view was the change process had been well-managed and led, while recognising that pace of transitioning may have slowed down due to the governance challenges. At the early post-merger evaluation SFC concluded that there was effective leadership of the changes required across the college and overall the Board, the Principal and the SMT had been working well together. Following their review in November 2014 Education Scotland noted that the college was led well by the Principal and supported by an experienced and highly committed senior management team while Directors of Faculty provided effective leadership for teaching staff throughout the period of transition. During our recent visits we heard feedback from staff that suggested management and leadership of the college were considered appropriate and effective.

Communication and staff engagement

43. In the main feedback from staff on the level and type of communication across the college was positive, and recognised the continued efforts including weekly emails from the Principal, regular briefings from senior managers, an annual staff away day and staff intranet and newsletter. Whilst most staff were generally happy with the levels of communication and feel well informed and engaged others felt that communication could be improved with additional feedback mechanisms being provided from staff to the college Senior Management Team.
44. In our session with the college Senior Management Team they clearly recognised that a multi-campus college requires additional solutions and communication channels to keep all staff and students informed, involved and reassured. It is clear this will continue to be a priority for the college moving forward.
45. Students commented that the college communicates with them using various methods, including student email and the VLE system. However, many students appear to still rely heavily on lecturing staff and key support staff to find out about significant developments within the college. Students highlighted that they would appreciate if lecturers made full use of the VLE and feel that not every member of the teaching staff fully appreciates the benefits it provides such as:
 - Accuracy of notes.
 - Ease of handing in assignments.
 - Feedback on coursework.

- General communication.
- Saving time and paper.

Organisational development and culture change

46. During the evaluation visits SFC asked staff and students whether the college had been successful in creating a Glasgow Clyde College identity and sense of belonging. For students the most important aspect was the campus at which they were studying although they recognised that the name and brand of Glasgow Clyde College was now well known by employers and stakeholders across the City. We heard mixed views from staff depending on their role. Those staff who now worked across different campuses as part of their normal working pattern were more likely to be positive about being part of one college, see the bigger picture and identify benefits of the merger. Overall, however, the message we heard was that it does feel more like one college while each campus retains its own identity and feel and this was viewed as equally important.
47. Feedback we heard from staff and senior managers suggest that earlier barriers between staff at different campuses were now disappearing. For example, there is more joint working happening and staff were now more open to collaborating with colleagues from other campuses – particularly where there is a focus on improving the student experience. Where good / innovative practice was identified in one campus it would now be shared with colleagues across the college more widely. In addition the standardisation of student services across all campuses had also helped to develop a sense of parity across campuses. Two key points mentioned as critical for staff in instilling a sense of belonging was being consulted and involved in decision making and openness.
48. The college undertook an extensive employee engagement survey in March 2015 supported by the then Board. Following this in late spring / summer a series of presentations were delivered across the college and relevant managers led on the dissemination of Faculty and Unit specific results to all staff within their area to identify key 'local' priorities. We were informed that work now continues at Faculty and Unit level to progress identified areas further and agree actions to be taken. A Task Group made up of Union and senior management representative was created in early 2015-16 to agree the college wide themes emerging at a local level, and to prioritise accordingly / including the following:
- Workload management.
 - Management of Change.
 - Culture and Values.
 - Business Systems.

Systems development / integration

49. System development was a priority at an early point in the merger with a need to implement single systems across the three campuses that would remove the duplication and consequent inefficiency that existed across the three campuses with specific systems and processes at each site. We heard positive feedback on early progress at the six-month point evaluation in 2014, for example a single network infrastructure was achieved early on together with a single email system. Student records were fully integrated for session 2014-15.
50. The feedback we heard from staff suggested that there is now more confidence in new systems generally despite some early problems. For example the college identified the significant disruption to student funding at the start of 2014-15 as a result of the bursary software adopted. A review of options identified a more effective product and this was taken forward as a priority. Staff recognised that developing the ICT to support systems and processes was a massive task but excellent progress has been made. A new Human Resources system was implemented in 2015 and the process of rolling out specific features of the new system continues. A new Finance system is currently being procured jointly with two other colleges.
51. Internally, a small Systems Development Team is responsible for providing a cohesive and robust set of systems used throughout the college. They have been instrumental in the design, development and deployment of many of the cross-college systems now used by staff and students. This is a good example of where staff from across each of the merging colleges had to work together to find solutions for the new college. A key aspect of this development was consultation with users to seek the right solutions.
52. A current issued identified by staff and students suggests that the Wi-Fi needs further investment as the system is not robust enough with one campus in particular experiencing difficulties in specific locations. When we raised this with the senior management we were reassured that this issue has been identified, that there were particular challenges to overcome, but this is now being addressed.

Student / learner engagement

53. The college's self-evaluation confirms that the creation of sabbatical officer posts for the Glasgow Clyde College Students' Association (GCCSA) at the point of merger and the development of their roles has impacted positively on student engagement levels across the college and delivered a range of benefits for the student body. In June 2015 the college made a commitment to continue to focus on the development of GCCSA in line with the key priorities outlined in the Framework for the development of effective and strong Students' Associations

(NUS Scotland). At the same time recognising that maintaining levels of funding for the GCCSA in future would be challenging.

54. During the AY2014-15 GCCSA had been effective in raising the level of student engagement and participation across the college with a record number of class representatives trained and operating appropriately. In the same year GCCSA won two high profile sector awards in recognition of aspects of their work. These developments were a positive legacy for the college and the new sabbatical officers and team in AY2015-16.
55. Following their 2016 Annual Engagement visit Education Scotland noted that class representatives in the college are aware of their role and carry out duties effectively and are also able to identify where they have influenced change or improvement in practice. However, as a result of the positive approach of staff, students do not always feel the need to rely on the class reps to raise issues. Education Scotland also noted that although class representatives understand the role of GCCSA in the college, students are generally not aware of what they do and the potential that exists for enhanced engagement in the life of the college.
56. Feedback from students during our evaluation echoed the Education Scotland views that overall students have positive and supportive relationships with staff and are confident in approaching them and discussing programme or college issues and there is low awareness of GCCSA and its role in engaging students. SFC were reassured that the new structure proposed for the next academic year should help to make the Students' Association a stronger and more effective body with greater visibility.
57. It is clear that the senior management and the Board are committed to learner / student engagement through continued support for GCCSA alongside the ongoing work of their learner / student engagement team. Key to future success will be how the roles of the GCCSA and the learner engagement team join together to deliver clear benefits for students and a positive college experience.

Financial management

58. SFC confirms that financial management at the college is considered to be strong, with an experienced and appropriately qualified team 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. Returns submitted to SFC are of high quality and demonstrate sound financial management. In our session with the college Board of Management members emphasised their confidence that the college is operating in a financially sustainable way.

Ongoing challenges and issues

59. Staff are aware of the further changes that will happen this year in implementing the curriculum shifts outlined earlier. As a result some staff expressed uncertainty about the loss of additional staff and the future of the college in a multi-college region. Staff and senior management reported they had a good working relationship with their counterparts at Glasgow Kelvin College and City of Glasgow College and staff from all three colleges work together on issues such as curriculum, enrolments and admissions, student support and access and equalities. However, at the time we spoke to Board members, there were still concerns about the future working of the GCRB and the implications for the Glasgow Clyde College as an assigned college.
60. Although most of the evaluation feedback we heard was positive, both with respect to the benefits of the merger and current position of the college, there were also issues raised by staff and students as ongoing challenges or issues. We discussed with the senior management the key areas identified for further improvement based on issues raised during our evaluation and outlined below. We are reassured that these issues were recognised by senior managers who were already seeking to find solutions:
- Enhancement of communications and consultation across the college, particularly developing appropriate feedback mechanisms from staff to senior management.
 - Creating a positive college culture at all campuses, parity of services and a sense of belonging for all staff.
 - Building upon improvements to the ICT / systems which impact on a range of operational issues and the learning and teaching experience.
 - Developing staff across the college to enhance their skills and experience and building on the welcome investment in enhancing learning and teaching via the professional development programme for existing lecturers.
 - Ensuring consistency of approach to support students through extending the use of the VLE, as appropriate to subject provision, and transforming the approach to learning and teaching through the development of a new innovation hub.
 - Continuing to work with the Students' Association in collaboration with its officers to shape its future development, ensure a consistency of approach and delivery across academic years, and confirm its place within the college to benefit all students.

Conclusion

61. SFC considers that this merger has been implemented well in the context of the challenging governance issues in the second year of the merger. It can be regarded as a success in terms of the college's achievements thus far. We heard

overwhelmingly positive feedback about what Glasgow Clyde College has to offer students flowing from in its partnerships with schools, universities, the local community, employers and other key stakeholders. These connections are all working to enhance the learner / student experience. Employers and other stakeholders provided testimonies that it operates effectively as a college of scale with a more distinctive brand and an excellent reputation for skills development. The view shared by all is that the staff are professional and place a high priority on engagement with employers and delivering for students.

62. Despite the challenging context referred to, SFC considers that the success in implementing the merger is a result of the ongoing efforts of the Principal and a strong senior management team, the highly committed teaching and support staff across the college who continued to prioritise the learner experience during the challenging early post-merger period and beyond.
63. We will continue to work closely with Glasgow Clyde College on a range of issues where it is appropriate for SFC to do so. In addition we will continue to work with GCRB to review the college's contribution to delivering the key elements of the Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement and to ensure the college addresses the current challenges related to its financial position.