

# College Post-Merger Evaluation Report

May 2016

# GLASGOW KELVIN 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 Glasgow Kelvin College

May 2016

## Background

1. Glasgow Kelvin College was formed on 1 November 2013, as a result of the merger of John Wheatley College, North Glasgow College, and Stow College. In August 2014 it became one of the three assigned colleges within Glasgow Region, the others being Glasgow Clyde College and City of Glasgow College.
2. The *Merger Proposal for New College Glasgow* (which was later named Glasgow Kelvin College), produced by the three legacy colleges, was ambitious and outlined the benefits of a new college at the heart of its community in the north and east of Glasgow – an area recognised as experiencing profound deprivation over a number of years. The case for the new merged institution was predominantly based on the benefits of a new, larger institution of scale which would be more attractive to learners/students but would also reach out to employers and industry in order to deliver a relevant curriculum to meet their current and future needs. The focus would be on excellence, progression and enterprise. It outlined a range of wider benefits which the new College aimed to deliver for its learners, staff and other stakeholders including its local communities and employer partners:
  - A single point of access for learners to high quality learning environments across the area.
  - Greater flexibility and choice through an expanded curriculum, which would include both access level and higher level provision.
  - A strong focus on vocational and employment skills that would increase learners' attractiveness to employers and meet the needs of the labour market, including core skills and provision in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM).
  - An enhanced senior phase provision through partnerships with secondary schools to support pathways for young people from school to college programmes and into employment.
  - Expanded and enhanced progression opportunities both within the College and to other Glasgow colleges and articulation arrangements with a range of Higher Education Institutions.
  - Attracting those potential students who are furthest from the labour market and do not currently participate in college education or training, through an expanded range of community partners and supported learning in the community.
  - Well-developed employer partnerships that will allow the College to deliver skills and training that meets the needs of industry and local employers and

involve more employers in the development of the curriculum.

3. The early post-merger evaluation in March 2014 reported that the College had made significant progress in creating the new organisation whilst recognising that it had been hindered initially by legacy issues, particularly financial and cultural. The Board was positive at this stage but recognised that it had been a real challenge for the new College to progress all aspects of merger implementation in a context where its inherited financial position was poorer than expected, one of its campuses required specific attention, new regional working arrangements and structures were emerging in Glasgow, and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) re-classification requirements were implemented. Despite this we heard positive feedback from staff and the clear message from students was that there had been no detriment to their learning experience at the College. We have been mindful of these key legacy and emerging issues during this post-merger evaluation.
4. Since the six month evaluation, Education Scotland has undertaken an external review of the quality of provision at the merged College. The review examined learning and teaching and other important activities that impact on the quality of the learner experience. The review identified some areas of excellent practice. However, overall the College was judged to be of 'limited effectiveness' in its arrangements to maintain and enhance the quality of its provision and outcomes for learners and other stakeholders. Education Scotland continues to monitor the College's progress against its post-review Action Plan in liaison with SFC focusing on the main points for action, including:
  - Leadership for learning and monitoring impact.
  - Self-evaluation and quality improvement activity.
  - Continuous professional development.
5. The College is currently in the process of finalising arrangements for the disposal of its City Campus and it has been working to ensure that staff and students are well supported during the transitional phase, that the accommodation that will be utilised is fit for purpose and that there is no detriment to students. The College has identified financial constraint in moving this forward.

## Evaluating the success of the merger

### *Efficiencies and benefits of scale*

6. 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) at the heart of its community in north and east Glasgow. 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.
7. In its self-evaluation (submitted to SFC in January 2016) the College confirms that since the point of merger it has sought to maximise the efficient and effective use of the resources available to it as a larger institution while continuing to support its mission. In particular it was a priority to ensure that the College provided a consistent level of support to learners across all campuses. The following are identified as specific positive outcomes:
  - The rationalisation of procurement and the move to single contracts to replace those inherited from the three legacy colleges.
  - The relocation of specific provision to the estate/campus that would provide the most appropriate learning environment and resources required for delivery.
  - The creation of specialist teams for admissions, advice and guidance, learner support and student which serve to ensure a higher level of service and support to all students and parity across all campuses.
  - The expansion of community-based learning centres from 24 on Vesting Day to 35 in early 2016 and enhancement of community partnerships, which built on the reputation and the expertise of one of the legacy colleges.
  - Additional opportunities for cross-curriculum working across the College.
  - The development and expansion of provision within the ten local secondary schools which supports both the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence and the priorities for Developing the Young Workforce.
  - Enhanced employer engagement and the development of a stronger external brand as Glasgow Kelvin College.
8. During our evaluation visits we heard evidence to confirm all of the points noted by the College. In particular the annual Fashion Show which brought together staff and students from across different subject areas to work together to deliver this extremely successful College event. Students were particularly enthusiastic about how this had enhanced their learning experience in the College, and this was corroborated by staff. Opportunities for future

collaboration like this are currently being explored by the College. The other key area of significant impact and growth was community learning.

### ***Improved outcomes for students***

9. In their merger self-evaluation the College clearly illustrates how it has focused on putting the learner at the centre of developments undertaken in the College since Vesting Day and provides evidence of how these initiatives are now delivering improved outcomes for students. We subsequently reviewed other sources of evidence including the college's performance indicators, its commitments to delivering the Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement, Learning and Teaching Committee Reports and Board of Management Reports and held in depth discussions with staff and students during our visit to the College. This has allowed us to come to some conclusions about the current and future (potential) impact on outcomes for students.
10. Feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive, particularly about the courses they are studying and the support they get from teaching and support staff. They noted that they had chosen to study at the College because of its reputation or as a result of personal recommendation and they considered that all staff showed genuine concern and care for students. They valued the additional learning and progression opportunities that were on offer as a result of being a larger college which built upon the reputation of the legacy colleges. One student comment, reinforced by others, was "student life has been brilliant here".

### ***Curriculum coherence***

11. The College has been a key partner with the other two Glasgow Colleges in developing and subsequently implementing 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. This work has identified that some curriculum areas needed to grow to meet economic need, while others that no longer fit the needs of the region are likely to shrink.
12. The outcome for the College has been the retention of specialisms such as Civil Engineering and Heating and Ventilation, and further development of its STEM curriculum generally. It will also continue to offer a significant range and volume of activity in Administration, Financial and Business Services and Health, Care and Education given the significant local employment in these areas. Alongside this the College had accepted the need to transfer some subject areas and some activity to the City of Glasgow College in 2015-16 and some further transfer will happen in 2016-17. It will also continue to prioritise community based adult learning opportunities and provision for care

experienced young people, which it has been a sector leader on. In addition it will move to provide more provision at SCQF levels 3/ 4 in order to meet the needs of the communities it serves. These outcomes are all consistent with the original aims outlined in the merger proposal.

13. It is too early to evaluate fully the impact of the curriculum changes which are still being implemented but the College itself is closely tracking this as part of its monitoring and review activities. Early indications from staff, students, senior management, the Board and external stakeholders is that although it was resource intensive and had a negative impact on the scale of funding available to the College, the focus on getting the curriculum right for learners has been positive and impacted on its successes in other areas including community based learning, senior phase provision, progression opportunities, a focus on vocational and employment skills and meeting the needs of employers. It is already some way to achieving the high quality curriculum that will meet the demand of the local and national labour market and the needs of all stakeholders and ensure that students have clear pathways to employment.
14. The negative impacts of the curriculum shifts have been the ongoing change across the college particularly the further loss of staff in 2015 and the ongoing resource implications. Staff referred to these additional changes as prolonging the change/merger process with a resultant impact on staff morale and relationships with the trade unions. Further change is also expected in 2016.

***Single point of access for learners to high quality learning environments***

15. The College has successfully brought together three legacy colleges across five key campuses and is viewed as a college of scale but with roots in its local community and a clear role in the north and east of the City. Students reported that they choose to study at the College due to the convenience of the campus to where they live but they also acknowledge that they are now part of a larger college with greater access to expertise, facilities and resources. Those students that we spoke to who had studied at the legacy colleges highlighted the range of excellent lecturing and support staff that they had access to at the different campuses and they noted particularly the potential for progression in some subject areas that would not have been available previously. Stakeholders, including employers, schools and community partners, also confirmed this.
16. It was noted by some students who had previously studied at the City Campus that this was the least desirable of the campuses to study at. Those students that had moved to other campuses from the City Campus were extremely positive about the facilities they now had access to. There was a recognition and acceptance that the City Campus estate was sub-optimal and needed to close with provision being moved and refocused in alternative campuses, and in some cases relocated within a different college. Although students tended to

view Springburn as the main College Campus they did not see this as detrimental to the services provided at the other campus.

### ***Excellence in learning and teaching***

17. SFC is clear that Glasgow Kelvin College is committed, along with the other two Glasgow Colleges, to improving student retention, attainment and achievement (evident in the Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement targets). However at the point of the Education Scotland External Review in January 2015 the data showed that in 2013-14 the College was under performing in some of its retention and attainment measures (remembering that Vesting day was part way into AY2013-14). In particular the report indicated that improvement of successful completion rates for full-time learners on HE programmes was required.
18. The College had already been working towards implementation of an enhanced Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy with its staff and it was able to respond to the Education Scotland limited effectiveness outcome with a strong, focused action plan which we are confident is making good progress. This has been confirmed by the College's HMle.
19. Reviewing the information provided by the College and our own data sources, in session 2014-15 student attainment at Glasgow Kelvin College rose overall from 72% to 74%. The College is now performing close to the national norm for full-time learners and significantly exceeds the national norm for part-time further education provision. However, further work is underway to improve success rates for part-time higher education programmes. In fact Glasgow Kelvin College, and Glasgow Region as a whole, have improved part-time FE success in 2014-15 – a year in which the sector as a whole dipped slightly in this measure after some years of consistent growth. The College puts this down to a recognition and understanding of the personal circumstances that are likely to impact on success for its students and addressing and supporting needs appropriately at an early stage of the learning experience.
20. Members of the senior management and the Board indicated that they were disappointed that the 2013-14 PIs were used as the baseline for the Education Scotland review given that they did not merge until part way through that year. However their clear focus since then has been on continuing to focus on excellence in learning and teaching through implementation of their enhanced Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Key aspects of this have been to create a renewed expectation that excellence in learning and teaching is a priority for Glasgow Kelvin College, guidance and support to curriculum managers and teaching staff through innovative curriculum design and ongoing CPD. They stressed that the key focus is on the role of the Class Tutor in

providing the guidance and support required by learners to achieve and progress.

21. Staff noted improvements in teaching as lecturers begin to learn from each other and focus on the College's overall performance. This is evidenced by improvements in the College's PIs for retention and achievement.

### ***Progression opportunities***

22. During our visits we heard positive feedback from students and staff confirming that enhanced opportunities for progression are now in place. For some students this might be a move to another campus to access the next level of study (FE or HE). There are also more effective articulation and transition routes to the College's partner HE institutions, including Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), University of the Highlands and Islands, University of Strathclyde and University of the West of Scotland to complete degree study.
23. In addition we heard that there are clearer routes through to College learning from community learning and the College is reaching out more to those furthest from employment. We also heard from students and staff that there are improved employment opportunities for students moving on as a result of the College's enhanced relationships with employer, the availability of work placements and understanding what employers are looking for.

### ***A strong focus on vocational and employment skills and meeting industry needs***

24. The feedback from employers and other stakeholders confirmed that the College is recognised and treated as a key regional partner of scale delivering for local people and for employers. It has developed more effective relationships with employers and industry partners and has a clearer understanding of how it can better meet industry needs.
25. We heard positive feedback about the College's pledge to continue to develop and enhance provision in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). The achievement of STEM assured status at the College confirms this commitment. The focus on STEM is shared across the three Glasgow colleges and the College has contributed to the development of the Glasgow Region STEM Manifesto.

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

26. The College noted that the information submitted to SFC in the self-evaluation and the financial template on merger costs and savings is based on a high level analytical review. This is necessary because the merger took place mid-year and an eight month accounting period was reported on which consisted of three

months as individual legacy colleges and five months as Glasgow Kelvin College. The next reporting period was 16 months.

27. The table below provides a detailed breakdown of the recurrent savings delivered to date.

<b>Glasgow Kelvin merger savings</b>		
<b>Staff savings</b>		
FTE Pre-merger	564	
VS departures (headcount)	-119	
FTE at July 2015	517	
<b>Total staff cost savings</b>		<b>£4,768,934</b>
Other savings to date		
	£	
Cancellation/rationalisation of memberships & subscriptions	£ 42,000	
Marketing & promotions	£19,000	
Procurement/contracts (insurance, audit, supplies & services, transport, cleaning)	£156,000	
Miscellaneous	£60,000	
Total		£277,000
<b>Total savings to July 2015</b>		<b>£5,045,934</b>

28. The direct merger costs were tracked and monitored throughout the post-merger implementation phase as a condition of SFC grant and are therefore easily identified. These costs were only part-funded by SFC. The total direct cost of the merger, including the early enabling activity, was £6.4m with £1.1m funded from reserves - of mainly two of the legacy colleges. The College had earlier confirmed with SFC that, as a consequence of not receiving transformation funds to cover the full cost of the merger as requested, the expenditure on other merger costs was reduced and managed in line with the available budget. The available funds that the College could access were less than anticipated as a result of decisions made by the legacy Boards in the period leading up to Vesting Day. The key areas of activity that were affected were the ICT projects that the new College would have wanted to implement early in the merger but had to subsequently phase over a longer period.
29. The other material cost identified by the College was pay harmonisation. However, the feedback we received was that it was more difficult to fully assess the impact of this due to the changes that had taken place throughout the post-merger period. This was partly the result of legacy colleges making pay awards

after the merger was announced despite an agreement not to do so. This was a key lesson learned from the early merger process.

30. The College noted the difficulties in accurately splitting other savings between merger and general efficiency savings. The College confirmed that the Merger Business Case assumed a much lower reduction in staff numbers than was eventually implemented. This was a combination of the reductions agreed by the three legacy colleges and a later reduction implemented by Glasgow Kelvin College in 2014. In our discussion with the Board they highlighted that in the period between July and October 2013 a Shadow Board was in place but with limited powers and therefore unable to influence key decisions made by the legacy Boards.
31. Overall the VS spend did not fully achieve the savings expected in this merger as a consequence of posts being made redundant by legacy colleges but then additional staff being recruited when a gap was identified. This is a key learning point for SFC and the sector.
32. In common with a number of other colleges, the College has an ongoing Lennartz debt arising from the construction of the legacy North Glasgow College's Springburn Campus. This will be an ongoing challenge.
33. While recognising that there is still work to do to turnaround the financial position of the College, some of which was the result of what they perceived as poor decision-making by some predecessor colleges prior to Vesting Day, the Board emphasised that this should not overshadow the achievement of the College in successfully implementing the merger and delivering clear benefits for students and other stakeholders.

### **Effective leadership and governance**

34. As part of the evaluation of effective leadership and governance SFC examined Board agendas, papers and minutes and had a full discussion with both Board members and the SMT during the College visit. SFC is satisfied that the College has effective corporate governance arrangements which have been subject to both internal and external audit.
35. Since Vesting Day there is clear evidence that the Board, the Principal and the SMT have worked together effectively to establish an effective corporate governance framework and drive forward a range of policies, procedures and processes to allow the new College to establish itself and develop a new entity and culture. There is a positive culture of self-evaluation and ongoing review of progress and effectiveness, ensuring that issues are on the radar of the Board and followed up until completed. We heard positive feedback from the Chairs of the various Board Committees and in particular the work of the Learning and Teaching Committee, Audit Committee and HR Committee.

36. The Board and the SMT were clearly united on the priorities and key challenges for the College in assisting members of its local communities to access learning and training as a route to employment and step out of disadvantage and poverty. This is reflected in the commitment of the Board to maintain the balance of its provision at 70% FE and 30% HE. It is committed to avoiding academic drift.
37. During the discussion with the Board we also heard statements to support their confidence in, and excellent working relationship with, the senior management team. The Board members present at the visit displayed a clear understanding of the role of the Board in both challenging and supporting the senior management to deliver an enhanced learning experience for its students. They noted particularly their commitment to monitoring the progress with the Action Plan and they have been receiving regular updates. Likewise the senior team appreciated the commitment and focus of the Board to ensure quality delivery for the College's learners and stakeholders. Another key commitment shared by the Board and the SMT was their support for ongoing staff development and particularly to ensure more teaching staff progress with the TQFE.
38. The Board confirmed their understanding of the context of the College's current financial challenges and referenced the challenging set of circumstances they have been dealing with since the point of merger. They are committed to reaching a more sustainable financial position.
39. Overall SFC has confidence that the Board has a full awareness of the current challenges outlined above and ongoing uncertainties for the College and for its staff, and are committed to working to resolve these. The Board were particularly aware of the need to continue to focus on positive industrial relations. The feedback from the staff and union representatives we spoke with confirmed that there are good processes and procedures in place.

### **Communications and staff engagement**

40. During the early evaluation at six months post-merger we heard key messages from staff that in their view communication had deteriorated since Vesting Day with a more infrequent flow of information from more senior staff to all other staff. This contrasted with the pre-merger perceptions of an effective communication strategy and positive engagement with staff. At the more recent evaluation point in February 2016 there was a consistent message to SFC that staff were receiving clearer and more consistent messaging and communications across the college via a variety of routes including all staff emails, a weekly college blog, staff bulletins, staff conference days, staff magazine and newsletter/blog from the Principal.
41. Staff considered managers and senior managers were approachable, were listening, and were confident that results from the staff survey were acted

upon. They suggested one improvement could be an introduction of an official forum for feedback to Management. Staff felt that they have opportunity to influence the College, and an example given was the recent drafting of the operational plan. Overall there was strong evidence that staff and management are working well together.

42. One issue we heard was about the need to continue to improve communications within teams where team members may be located at different campuses and where line managers were not always in the same building.
43. Comments from students suggest that they continue to rely heavily on lecturing staff and key support staff for current information and to find out about changes to courses and other issues, which mirrors what we heard at the early post-merger discussions. However, the Students' Association and the Student Engagement team were also sources of information. Some students noted that communications across the campuses could be better and the Principal could be more visible.
44. The College has continued to maintain the well-established engagement it has with external partners and stakeholders. Also the formal meetings with both UNISON and EIS have been supplemented with an agreed schedule of informal meetings.

### **Organisational development and culture change**

45. There was a general view expressed by staff and students that they now operate as one College with Springburn Campus viewed as the main campus as it is the biggest and, from the students' point of view, the Principal is located there. However, this was not viewed negatively and comments were made about the effective working and the services provided for students across the campuses.
46. During the discussions with staff we heard consistent messages to suggest that there had been a clear culture shift at the College since our earlier visit at the six-month point. There was a real sense of belonging to one college across all groups of staff and at each of the campuses. We discussed this with the senior management team and with the Board during our visit who confirmed that building trust, cohesion and shared values had taken time and are ongoing. They recognised that early attempts to bring staff together had not been successful so they had to approach this in a different way. They provided an outline of the combination of actions which had helped to achieve this.
47. The Board referred to a set of values which are recognised across the College which underpin behaviours. They also positioned learning and teaching at the core of everything the College does. To further support the development of a

common culture and sense of belonging they have focused on professional development of teaching staff, skills development and building ambition into the College planning processes, cross-campus working and looking for shared solutions and promoting technology in learning and teaching.

48. In addition one of the key successes identified by the senior management team was to bring staff together to identify ways to become more innovative in teaching approaches and enhance the learner experience. Working with the Gazelle Colleges Group they developed three initiatives to take this forward. They initially trained 50 staff in 'entrepreneurial thought and action'; agreed to support staff led projects for change called Empowered to Take Action; and have developed project-based learning around the STEM curriculum. The combination of these efforts, focusing on professionalism in learning and teaching and allowing staff to own and lead the change has positively influenced the shift in culture. Curriculum managers are an important group who influence staff morale and they continue to meet regularly.

### **Systems development integration**

49. The feedback we heard from staff and student and the evidence we have reviewed indicates that the College has made positive progress on the integration of systems across all campuses since the early post-merger evaluation when the College was still in the early stages of integrating systems. Support staff were particularly positive about how the new teams had developed to solve some of the problems early on in the merger in terms of systems integration.
50. Overall there was a view that systems had taken a while to come together but were now working more effectively and that the ICT sub-structure had improved dramatically with more support. The issues that caused concern early on included admissions and enrolment, timetabling, student support. There was also a recognition of the key expertise that had been lost as a result of staff departures.
51. SFC recognises that it takes time to integrate systems and that there are additional complexities when vesting day occurs at a point in year as opposed to the start of the academic year. The staff view was that systems integration should have been front-loaded to avoid the stress for staff and the challenges that emerged in year one of the merger. Also there should have been more consultation with users to seek the right solutions up front.

### **Student/learner engagement**

52. The College is committed to learner/student engagement and has a Learner Engagement Strategy that sets out its approach to devising and implementing ways of involving learners in decision making processes at individual,

programme and college levels. The College believes that empowering learners and embracing their views will have an effective impact on developing and improving learning and teaching and improving quality. This was endorsed by Education Scotland in their Review in early 2015 although they indicated that more could be done by staff to engage students fully with planning and negotiating their own learning.

53. Feedback from students suggests that they have positive and supportive relationships with staff and are confident in approaching them and discussing programme or college issues. Those students that had been attending the College for more than one year reported a significant improvement over the last year in learner engagement.
54. The college uses a range of effective feedback mechanisms to gather learner views, inform review and evaluation, and improve the learner experience. The College looks for student feedback after every block and student surveys are taken to gauge levels of student satisfaction. Survey results suggest that the improvement in the Class Representative system is a key part of this. In addition to surveys students have participated actively in a number of College-wide quality enhancement processes such as 'stop and check' activities and focus groups.
55. The College Student Engagement team, working closely with the Students' Association recruited 270 class representatives for session 2015-16. We were reassured that there is an effective system in place for training class reps in their role, which supports learner confidence well and has improved the quality of feedback. The Students' Association officers also have regular meetings with senior staff.
56. The Students' Association has been active in the two years post-merger across the College and it represents the student body at both regional level, through the GCRB and the Student Executive Group, and College Board level. The Students' Association feel that the college values and listens to them. Learner engagement officers and the Students' Association are working well together to promote learner engagement and develop staff understanding and commitment.

### **Financial management**

57. From the College's self-evaluation and the financial information provided to SFC it is clear that the financial environment in which it has been operating since the point of merger continues to be a challenge. The overarching message we received is that the senior management and the Board are working hard to reach a sustainable position. SFC recognises that the College had to develop a new business plan post-Vesting to address these financial challenges and this sits alongside the strategic vision outlined in the Strategic Plan 2015-17.

58. Our discussions with both the SMT and the Board confirmed the range of issues and constraints impacting on the College's financial position and future sustainability. In particular the legacy issues from the three pre-merger colleges and the reduction in activity as a result of the commitment to implement the requirements of the Glasgow Region Curriculum and Estates Plan 2020 have had a significant impact. SFC was already aware of the financial issues discussed during the evaluation visits and has been working closely with the College as it works to address these challenges.
59. The requirement to review the Glasgow Region Curriculum and Estates to ensure the delivery of the right learning in the right place for learners and stakeholders was initially discussed by all three Glasgow Colleges in November 2013 (immediately after Vesting Day at the College). This major review was subsequently undertaken jointly by the three colleges from early 2014 and the Plan endorsed by the individual College Boards and the GCRB at the end of 2014 and early 2015. It was reflected in the Glasgow Region Outcome Agreement for AY2015-16. SFC is aware of the considerable amount of management time that the College had to commit to this exercise in what was the first year of merger implementation.
60. The College faces ongoing challenges to its financial sustainability, which are illustrated by the following:
- SFC income has fallen by £5.5m or 19% between the last year of the three legacy colleges and academic year 2015-16.
  - Other income has dropped against both the business case and pre-merger actual.
  - Over the period staff costs have not reduced to the level anticipated in the business case and some of the issues which may have impacted on this have been highlighted earlier.
61. We are reassured that despite this unique set of challenges the College has good financial management and procedures in place and there is consistency in financial returns to SFC. Good relationships are in place to facilitate this. Staff at the College are coping well with the increased reporting demands consequent to the reclassification of the College as a public body by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) with effect from 1 April 2014.
62. Following our discussion with the Board our view is that it has clear oversight of the task required by the College to turnaround its financial position and a clear underpinning strategy for the future. However, the SMT and the Board outlined that there are still uncertainties around the future role and operation of GCRB when it assumes full fundable body status and the impact of its funding

decisions on the future sustainability of Glasgow Kelvin College. In addition they advised that their view was that pressures on the sector to continue to deliver the same level of activity with less income and fewer staff in the merged colleges could eventually impact on the learner experience and opportunities available.

### **Ongoing challenges and issues**

63. Staff were aware that further changes will happen this year with the closure of the City Campus and the transfer of further activity to the other colleges in Glasgow. There was a general feeling that the College had learned from the early experience of change when things were done so quickly. They anticipated that the changes that were about to happen had been planned and would be managed well with no detriment to students.
64. Staff were acutely aware of the ongoing financial pressures and the impact on the future operation of the college. There was a unified plea from all groups of staff for some stability once the further changes to curriculum and estates were made this year.
65. Staff considered that they had a good working relationship with their counterparts at Glasgow Clyde College and City of Glasgow College as a result of the curriculum work across the region and staff from all three colleges working together on issues such as admissions and enrolments, student support and access and equalities. However, they reported limited engagement with the GCRB. Staff considered they needed to work even more closely across Glasgow in future to identify shared approaches and solutions to common challenges. Overall they thought that college provision across Glasgow Region was better understood by external stakeholders, including employers.
66. We also identified some areas for improvement based on issues raised during our evaluation. We are reassured that the College is already aware of these and is continuing to focus on:
  - Improving communications across and between all campuses.
  - Developing feedback mechanisms from staff to management.
  - Building on the strengths of the College and fully utilising all available expertise.
  - Ensuring consistency of approach of teaching staff across the College in providing additional support to all students.
  - Further developing the Students' Association in collaboration with its officers and confirming its place within the daily life of the College to benefit all students.

## Conclusion

67. SFC considers that this merger has been implemented well given the challenging context pre and post-merger. It can be regarded as a success in terms of the College's achievements for students, stakeholders and staff. There was a consensus view that the College has been successful in taking the best parts of the legacy colleges in developing the new institutions but it has also raised the bar in what it expected in terms of the student experience and outcomes for learners.
68. 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, and the Board of Management who have been resolute in their vision and strategic leadership of the College. However, the College's financial position remains an ongoing concern.
69. We have taken account of recent discussions with Education Scotland about the College's progress in delivery against the post-review Action Plan and we are reassured that the College is making continued improvement and working to address the main points that resulted in the earlier judgement. We will continue to work with Glasgow Kelvin College in collaboration with Education Scotland to ensure the College fully realises the benefits of the merger for students, staff and other stakeholders
70. We will continue to work closely with Glasgow Kelvin College on a range of issues. This includes working in collaboration with Education Scotland to ensure the College fully addresses the issues raised as part of the 'limited effectiveness' judgement. 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.