

College Infrastructure Investment Plan: Progress Report



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Summary:	The Scottish Funding Council's College Infrastructure Investment Plan: Progress Report provides an update on the development of an Infrastructure Investment Plan for the college sector, and outlines the work planned for AY 2025 -2026.
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Executive summary

1. This document provides a progress update on the development of a College Infrastructure Investment Plan (College IIP) for the sector. It outlines the significant work done to date and, at a high level, the work to be progressed at pace, prior to publication of the College IIP in autumn 2026. SFC will also update on progress of the above work throughout 2025 and 2026. The timeframe of this work has necessarily flexed to reflect the complexities of the project and related data. We are continuing to work with colleges on this.
2. This is part of an overarching strategy for the sector – the College Infrastructure Strategy (CIS). The College Infrastructure Strategy (CIS): The approach to delivering Scotland’s College Infrastructure Plan highlights the Scottish Funding Council’s (SFC) ambition for “a college estate that will provide a high quality, technologically advanced and sustainable learning environment enabling and enhancing successful learning and skills outcomes for students, staff, and communities”.
3. This progress update has been prepared through extensive work by colleges and Colleges Scotland, in collaboration with SFC, Scottish Government and Scottish Futures Trust. We would like to thank everyone involved in this significant, strategically important work. Robust governance processes are in place for the College IIP development through the Infrastructure Development Group [Project Board] and the College Infrastructure Departmental Assurance Group [Project Steering Group].
4. Significant progress has been made with the key points highlighted below:
 - The [baselining exercise](#) has provided us, for the first time ever, with a single comprehensive dataset of the entire college estate. This was a complex exercise with significant work done by colleges, SFC and others.
 - This dataset will allow us to begin discussions with colleges to consider prioritisation, rationalisation, shared services and collaboration in a strategic and coherent way as we consider the investment required for the college estate of the future, moving from place-based provision to outcome-based provision.
 - The proposals emerging from the College Transformation Framework, including reformed curriculum planning across the college sector, will also feed into this work, while the changes to college disposal guidelines will help facilitate future investment.
 - The work ties in with the work of the sector’s Tripartite Group in seeking strategic solutions to issues facing the sector.
5. This next phase of work will further develop the findings from the baselining exercise. We will also launch the Scottish Capital Investment Manual (SCIM) for Colleges, a new process to assess capital projects, with supporting templates and guidance to ensure appropriate level of investment into projects that support the best possible outcomes for the sector, learners and communities.
6. This progress report provides an update on the significant innovative work carried out to date and the future plans for delivery of the College IIP by autumn 2026. It signposts the delivery of the baselining exercise and the Navigator Tool as innovative new tools available now for the sector. SFC will provide regular progress updates as we work towards finalisation of the College IIP.

Introduction

7. The College Infrastructure Strategy (CIS) was developed in response to stakeholder feedback including the college sector, Scottish Government and Audit Scotland. Developed in partnership with the college sector, the CIS signposts a more structured and methodical approach to investment in the sector.
8. The sector is constantly changing as it adapts to new circumstances. College infrastructure must adapt to reflect changing priorities, pedagogy and curriculum, the requirements and needs of students and staff, and the existing and emerging skills required for a modern, successful economy and employers.
9. The College IIP is a call to action for all stakeholders to ensure that future estate and other infrastructure requirements across all colleges can be appropriately prioritised and funded to maximise outcomes and ensure a consistent and balanced approach to investment.
10. The College IIP will describe the new process to be applied in the development of college infrastructure investment projects and report on ongoing research into any new capital funding models that may become available to colleges.
11. The development of a national infrastructure investment plan is an incredibly complex and challenging piece of work.
12. We have already delivered an innovative and powerful live database of the college estate and other infrastructure across Scotland which is providing benefits to individual colleges and SFC.
13. The proposals emerging from the College Transformation Framework, including reformed curriculum planning across the college sector, will also feed into this work, while the changes to college disposal guidelines will help facilitate future investment.

Purpose and background

14. Scotland's colleges are a critical part of our infrastructure. They are integral to the success of the economy and the communities that they serve. Attractive, technologically current, and fit-for-purpose estate is essential to deliver the colleges' core purpose in delivering successful outcomes for their students.
15. The existing college estate comprises 24 colleges, 97 campuses and 270 blocks (buildings or other assets e.g. land) with a book value of over £2bn and 800,000 m² Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA).
16. Over 300,00 enrolments and 125,000 full-time Equivalent (FTE) students attend college, with over 11,000 FTE staff.
17. The requirement to manage, maintain and invest in infrastructure includes colleges having to provide safe, resilient, accessible, sustainable facilities which meet legal standards. They must also provide equal access to suitable college estate and other infrastructure across Scotland, including the opportunity and potential of digital technology.
18. College operating models have evolved in recent years, especially through the uptake of digital

and hybrid learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. New economic and societal priorities, such as regional shifts in employment, skills needs and demographic changes, have led to colleges reconsidering their delivery strategies to remain relevant and successful.

19. The College IIP will define new processes for SFC and the college sector to manage, evaluate and prioritise business cases for infrastructure programmes and projects in a methodical and objective way. The investment planning requirements outlined in the College IIP will be based on three investment themes (Physical, Digital and Net Zero) and the four strategic options (Invest, Maintain, Collaborate and Divest) available to colleges.

Baselining exercise

20. The baselining exercise, including the Navigator Tool, is an important piece of work and provides the first ever baseline for the national college infrastructure.
21. The development of the College IIP is a strategically critical piece of work for the college sector. As such, it is of the utmost importance that baseline data relating to current college infrastructure and its performance is robust.
22. Last year, SFC worked in partnership with the college sector to conduct the baselining exercise. This exercise gathered data to provide an understanding of the current college infrastructure performance and to use this information to develop the College IIP. The College IIP will define the investment and maintenance requirements for the sector based on the colleges' physical, digital and net zero infrastructure needs.
23. The baselining exercise utilised an online infrastructure data collection and analytical tool, called Navigator tool ©AtkinsRealis. It has been configured to provide SFC and colleges with a tool to collect infrastructure information and data for each college that can be analysed and reported by individual colleges, for each campus and block.
24. The richness of data and level of analysis available through the Navigator tool provides insights not previously available. Navigator is also a practical tool for both SFC and individual colleges to continually keep the college infrastructure data up-to-date with the resulting database available for reporting. Additionally, Navigator provides a suite of powerful reports and dashboards that can be configured to meet users' needs to reflect CIS investment themes and strategic options.
25. Under SFC's new processes, colleges will update data uploaded as part of the initial baselining exercise at a set point each year via the Navigator tool. This annual snapshot of information will ensure that SFC and colleges hold the most up-to-date information possible to support capital investment decisions. This will help support better decision making and consideration of options and approaches to investment locally, nationally and regionally, for each college.

Scottish Capital Investment Manual for Colleges

26. The Scottish Capital Investment Manual (SCIM) was developed by Scottish Futures Trust to provide guidance on the processes and techniques to be applied in the development of infrastructure investment programmes and projects. SFC has adopted the SCIM process and tailored it for the college sector.
27. The SCIM for Colleges process is pivotal to engaging better with colleges on complex issues in a

meaningful and consistent way with clear business cases, criteria, evaluation and funding approval process.

28. SCIM for Colleges reflects college sector-specific issues. It provides a methodology whereby SFC can evaluate and prioritise business cases against available funding that reflect investment themes and strategic options for colleges to align with national priorities and outcomes.
29. All projects submitted to SFC for consideration for investment must follow the strategic principles of CIS.
30. The college SCIM will provide an objective process for assessing investment needs from “Statements of Need” to “Final Business Cases” that fully complies with policy guidance and HM Treasury Green Book investment appraisal techniques.
31. A key addition to SFC’s previous Capital Decision Point Process will be the introduction of Strategic Outline Cases. These will be developed from the Statements of Need and will be a formal assessment of the strategic fit of the projects for the college, both regionally and nationally. This will enable SFC to prioritise projects across the sector in a transparent and systematic way for the first time.
32. Business cases will be considered on an annual basis with clearly defined milestones and timelines for submission, evaluation and approval.
33. SCIM will correspond with annual funding cycles and work within defined budgets and available funding. Once implemented, the new process will ensure that any business cases submitted are rigorously tested at each stage. This will ensure requirements for business cases are clear at the outset and ensure evaluation requirements are addressed early.
34. New templates and associated guidance will be developed to support this new process. Testing of the new templates and processes, in collaboration with the college sector, will be required prior to publication of the College IIP. This will make clear from the outset the expectations and requirements for making the best possible business case for funding to SFC.
35. SFC will also introduce a clear, transparent process for the evaluation of business cases to facilitate robust decision making based on the best possible outcomes for the sector.
36. SCIM for Colleges will provide ‘checks and balance’ at a sector level; it will provide the assurance and governance required for the level of investment required.
37. This approach supports coherent infrastructure investment planning and presents an opportunity for colleges to articulate their future investment needs and requirements in a consistent way. It will provide a portfolio of projects that can be evaluated and prioritised based on a transparent methodology which will be developed during the next phase of work.
38. The next phase of work will also look to undertake analysis of college configuration and delivery models where information is available. This will be part of a long-term process of strategic review.
39. The level of information relating to curriculum and curriculum development is not currently at a stage where we will be able to link it to our review of college estates and other infrastructure. However, we will look to progress this element of our work in the future as it is integral to the future size and shape of the sector and learning estate.

40. We will begin the process of reviewing need and service delivery options on a regional level to make the most of the college sector's offerings nationally. This will assist in identifying areas of collaboration and sharing resources across the sector to support improved outcomes and efficiencies for colleges, learners, and communities.

Capital Funding Models

41. SFC's work on the existing and alternative capital funding models aims to ensure the financial viability of college infrastructure investment and promote innovative capital financing solutions that support the college sector's strategic ambitions. Capital budgets continue to be subject to significant pressures, therefore securing a package of diverse funding sources is key to the College IIPs' success.
42. We have asked the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) to provide a comprehensive picture of all currently available and any possible alternative capital funding models. SFT colleagues have summarised funding and financing levers in a paper to be published alongside this report which informs SFC's work. The paper sets out the Scottish Government funding and financing mechanisms for infrastructure investment, and some high-level considerations for SFC to take forward in considering their applicability to the college sector.
43. At present, the existing funding model is the only identified approach to investment in the college sector.
44. The report also covers newer mechanisms such as the Mutual Investment Model (MIM), but this is only applicable for larger capital projects rather than refurbishments due to the risk profile. Scottish Government adopted MIM as part of its infrastructure investment toolkit in 2019, but the model has not been deployed to date.
45. Unlike universities, colleges cannot borrow due to the reclassification to the public sector by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in 2014.
46. We are committed to a programme of regular review of capital funding models as part of our College IIP development. We will continue to explore new capital funding opportunities with the Scottish Government and SFT with our guidance to be updated as and when new capital funding opportunities emerge.

College Infrastructure Investment Plan (College IIP)

47. The College IIP will define the overall infrastructure investment need for Scotland's colleges and the processes in place to identify, evaluate and deliver projects.
48. Investing in the college estate will be vital to ensure there are no health and safety concerns and compliance issues in the future to deliver positive learner experiences and outcomes for all stakeholders.
49. The guidance within the final document, alongside the guidance material and templates provided as part of SCIM for Colleges, will define the process for colleges to submit business cases and apply for capital funding.
50. The new process will facilitate better engagement with colleges and improve the quality of

information about colleges' infrastructure strategies and investment plans. This will be the first time that a sector-wide perspective has been available. It is intended to provide a joined-up view of infrastructure investment requirements that can be delivered in a planned and managed way leading to better infrastructure investment decisions within Scotland's college sector over the next decade.

51. Investment in the college sector is an iterative process. It requires accurate information to create a coherent infrastructure investment plan. The quality and integrity of the College IIP can be improved as engagement with the college sector progresses through the IIP process, and any gaps in the data to be collected are clarified and resolved.

Next steps

52. The next phase of work will require colleges to submit up-to-date infrastructure strategies and Statements of Need that reflect the principles of the CIS and future curriculum strategies and plans. This will help ensure that future investment is aligned to long-term needs. We will be working with the sector to develop and test templates and guidance for the next stage of this process.
53. We will continue to work with other bodies including the Scottish Futures Trust, Environmental Association of Colleges (EAUC) and Jisc to leverage expertise and best practice approaches to infrastructure, environmental and technology issues for the sector.
54. We are focused on getting every element of this absolutely right for colleges and providing a flexible and responsive approach to reflect priorities and changing circumstances.
55. We are committed to the partnership approach, which was a founding principle of the CIS, and we will continue to work closely, consult, and engage with colleges at all stages.
56. We will engage further with colleges at an individual and regional level to understand the challenges they face and opportunities to be developed considering best practices and a collaborative approach.
57. This next phase of work will build on the successful delivery of the Navigator Tool and the baselining exercise. It will incorporate the outputs from the Tripartite Group and the College Transformation Framework work. This will provide clarity and guidance on such matters as estate rationalisation, infrastructure investment including prioritisation of projects, shared facilities, alternative funding options and the Scottish Government's Single Scottish Estate programme.
58. SFC will prioritise the following key areas of work within the next 12 months:
 - Refresh college engagement process.
 - Deploy the SCIM processes for colleges.
 - Define and test objective evaluation criteria to progress and prioritise business cases.
 - Provide training for college estate teams in using the SCIM for Colleges documents.
 - First annual update of baseline data using Navigator tool (as described in paragraph 25)

- Updated infrastructure strategies for each college, noting that these are dependent on college curriculum plans.
 - Explore possible options for supporting colleges in providing data such as space utilisation surveys, net zero data capture and measured building surveys etc.
 - Develop new sector guidance on measuring and capturing space utilisation data.
 - Refine investment themes (physical, digital and net zero) and strategic options (investment, maintain, collaborate and divestment) and best practice approaches.
 - Explore Future Operating Models work.
 - Continue research into alternative capital funding models with Scottish Government and SFT.
59. SFC will update on progress of the above work throughout 2026. Working with our key delivery partners, our collective intention is to publish the College IIP in Autumn 2026.