

## **SFC Review – Borders College Response**

### **Borders College Context**

Borders College is the only further education college located in the Borders Region. It co-locates on the Galashiels Campus with Heriot Watt Textiles School. It also has campuses in Tweedbank, Hawick, Newtown St Boswells and a base in Eyemouth Boatyard.

Across the rural landscape Borders College is connected to our communities through our Digital Learning & Skills Network providing 13 digital spokes located in schools, community venues and employer premises to enable remote learning. The network was developed in partnership with Dumfries & Galloway College as part of a South of Scotland Enterprise Partnership project.

82% of enrolments come from a Borders postcode. 44% of our enrolments are aged 24+. We have a number of specialist courses that attract learners from all across Scotland and beyond. These include our HND in Downhill Mountain Biking, HND Game Keeping, Rugby Borders Academy of Sporting Excellence (BASE) HND and commencing this year in partnership with the Scottish Racing Academy our Racehorse care programme.

Each year we have insufficient credits to respond to the demand. This limits our capacity to grow in key sectors or develop new curriculum in response to future skills needs. Our Apprenticeship contract has grown by over 100% during the last 3 years to over 350 apprenticeship per year and we have a waiting list of employers wanting to access the FWDF despite having the fund increased to £140k from £107k.

5% of our credit allocation is utilised in delivering Senior Phase provision through our Schools Academy. In some subject areas we are the sole provider of Higher qualifications in our schools. 15% of our provision is in HE.

Heriot Watt have approximate 500 students on the Galashiels Campus each year. 98% of those enrolments are not from local students. The provision is Textiles focused with no articulation agreements in place for college students to progress locally.

We have shared services agreements in place with Heriot Watt for facilities management, library and IT Services.

Borders College is a cornerstone within our region. We are proactive in our community engagement and support individuals of all ages and backgrounds to gain skills and qualifications, helping the most disadvantaged and furthest from the labour market, and enabling our regional economy by delivering the skilled workforce that businesses need. We have an excellent track record of working in partnership with key organisations and employers locally in responding to our local needs.

Our extensive partnership working brings a richness and diversity of expertise and knowledge to Borders College. We are actively engaged with the Edinburgh South East City Region Deal (ESECRD), Borderlands Deal and South of Scotland Enterprise Agency (SOSEA). We lead the

ecosystem recognising the role and impact colleges have in enabling a more inclusive society and economy.

- 2. What do you think colleges, universities and specialist institutions should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery? (You may wish to comment on teaching and skills development, sectoral and employer needs and employability, research, innovation and knowledge exchange, widening access and equalities issues.)*

A blended model of delivery which balances digital, in work and classroom learning is essential to provide the type of responsive and flexible learning that employers and students now require. The balance of these component parts needs to reflect the learner. Some learners need the structure and support that classroom learning provides and some learn best through practical application of skills. Flexibility in qualification and funding structures would better enable colleges to develop a more personalised learning plan that meets the needs of individuals.

To progress a high quality blended learning approach there is a need to invest in the capacity of colleges to develop this. This includes the development of interactive online learning content and digital pedagogy. There is an opportunity for the sector to collaborate and share the development of resource and continual professional development around digital pedagogy through a consortium.

In a rapidly changing employment landscape, the role of colleges in providing lifelong learning opportunities is essential. This requires changes to the funding methodology and accreditation of learning structures. In partnership with Borders Council, Borders College developed a Care Career Academy, which supports care workers to gain learning modules, through a blended approach, building up over time to larger recognised qualifications. This model acknowledged that many employees are juggling work and home life alongside not having the confidence to enrol on a large qualification. However, the bureaucracy of developing short programmes and fitting them within the current accreditation and qualification framework is limiting.

Colleges make a significant contribution to innovation and knowledge exchange through the talent development and business improvement work they undertake with employers each year. The vast majority of employers in the Borders are small and micro businesses. Employers and staff often don't recognise the term innovation and associate this with large scale research and developing something new. Innovation and its impact is relative to the environment it is being adopted in.

The role of colleges in supporting innovation in the workplace should be further acknowledged and supported by specific funding to create a more innovative, creative and dynamic environment for development. The current bureaucracy in place in order to access innovation funding is a barrier for employers and colleges. In light of the fragile South of Scotland economy a ringfenced pot of money should be made available for employers and the colleges to access which is reflective of the need.

Borders Learning & Skills Partnership, which has membership from Borders Council Economic Development, Schools, DWP, NHS, Social enterprise/third sector, DYW and Heriot Watt.

Our new Strategic Ambition document clearly outlines how we will respond to our regional and national socio-economic priorities over the next 5 years.

<http://www.borderscollege.ac.uk/strategicambition>

- 1. What do you think works well in the current further and higher education arrangements that we should keep in order to secure Scotland's inclusive social and economic recovery from the current pandemic? How can we best preserve and strengthen those features of education, research and innovation in Scotland that we most prize, in a very challenging funding environment?*

Colleges have a regional focus and so play a critical role in advancing an inclusive economy through responding to local needs and providing relevant and inclusive learning opportunities for all. Although Borders College has a regional focus, we respond to national priorities such as growing STEM provision (40% increase between 2014-19) and work in partnership with other colleges and universities to draw on specific expertise and knowledge to continue to provide outstanding learning opportunities in a rapidly changing world. Examples include UHI for HND in Horticulture, Edinburgh University on Data Driven Innovation and SRUC on a Degree in Rural Leadership. The focus on place needs to remain central in any future system changes.

Regional Outcome Agreements (ROAs) in principle provide a strategic framework to work within. However, they need to focus on outcomes at a strategic level and need to be lean in content. The Education Scotland Self Evaluation and Enhancement Plan needs to be either fully embedded or kept completely separate in future.

Borders College is more than a place of learning. We provide pastoral and welfare support that enables people to gain confidence and become more resilient enabling them to become engaged global citizens. We support a more inclusive society and economy by supporting our students to overcome complex social issues such as child poverty, equality and diversity, employability and care experienced.

Borders College is fully integrated into our local business community. We contribute to improving productivity and applied innovation by working with around 500 employers each academic year. This is through providing upskilling, training and retraining, Apprenticeships, work experience and in work projects. Every year we have insufficient funding to respond to the local demand with waiting lists for credit funded provision and FWD funding. We manage Borders DYW and sit on the industry steering group.

In order to build on these strengths the sector requires greater flexibility within and streamlining of the different funding pots to better support colleges to increase the economic, social and human capital of the regions they serve and nationally. Also parity of funding across the tertiary

Whilst the creation of national Innovation Centres has provided the platform for Scotland's colleges and universities to exchange knowledge and collaborate on new design and products, the current structure hinders engagement. Borders College has attempted to engage purposefully with the Innovation Centre's, especially to complement our Sustainable Construction Hub and Technology Enhanced Care Hubs. However, the response has been limited. The return on investment should be reviewed, taking into consideration the impact on inclusive growth and regional productivity gains.

The FWDF fund should be expanded to support SME and Micro Businesses in responding to the economic crisis. In the South of Scotland the vast majority of businesses employ less than 5 people.

The tertiary sector adds more value when it works collaboratively within the educational ecosystem, rather than in silos. Knowledge exchange, skills and capacity are used to better effect. The tertiary funding model and structures need to encourage not hinder this approach. Borders College has benefited from working with HE and FE partners through the ESECRD to develop and deliver programmes in Data Science and training for Health & Social Care in the adoption and use of SMART technologies and new Construction programmes. Through SOSEA we have worked in partnership with D&G College in developing our Learning & Skills Network. Currently we are working with D&G on a joint Digital Hub proposal and looking at a federal model between South Lanarkshire College, D&G College and ourselves on Sustainable Construction & Green Energy. Successes to date have all relied on non core SFC funding which provided a level of flexibility and capacity not usually available.

Advances in technology present an opportunity for the sector to gain financial and time efficiencies by adopting common platforms and using the data held to provide real time information to improve performance across the sector and reporting. A common Management Information System and Financial system would provide the SFC with real time data. It would enable colleges to compare performance and we would make efficiencies by having single maintenance contracts and sectoral super users developing common reports and carrying out upgrades. A small group of colleges (Edinburgh, Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, Borders and Dumfries & Galloway) would be interested in progressing this with SFC over the medium term. This would require upfront investment but provide longer term efficiencies.

There is a need to value HNC/HNDs for what they were designed for. A higher level technical qualification which provided the necessary skills for employment. They are now viewed as a stepping stone to degrees. A different and equitable tertiary funding model would allow colleges and universities to work together and co-create degree programmes that provide a more efficient learner journey. There is an opportunity to develop further Graduate Apprenticeships with colleges at the centre of that development because of the extensive experience we have in Apprenticeship provision and engagement with employers.

*3. How can colleges, universities and specialist institutions best support Scotland's international connectedness and competitiveness in the post-pandemic, post-EU membership environment?*

With a global war on talent, Scotland should make more of the excellent tertiary system that exists in Scotland and adopt a Team Scotland approach to celebrate and promote Scotland's culture and educational excellence, when promoting the country as a study destination or ideal location for business headquarters.

We must continue to provide a rounded curriculum, which develops our students as global citizens, and embed an international awareness into studies.

The most effective manner for improving the connectedness of colleges internationally would be a robust replacement for ERASMUS+ type activities. In terms of competitiveness, the quality of our learners as they enter international markets is the most significant demonstration of the quality of Scottish education.

*4. What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges, universities and specialist institutions? For institutional leaders, how are you planning to address these challenges and opportunities?*

Opportunities include activity such as this review, which will provide a comprehensive focus on the future tertiary ecosystem whilst learning from the proactive actions the SFC has taken to provide flexibility in funding use and reducing bureaucracy in this recovery year.

There is the opportunity for the sector to design and develop a collective leadership and systems approach that delivers not only a short-term recovery, but one that is sustained and ensures that the structures and skills offer that is redefined from this point is one that will contribute to a more inclusive economy and increase the nation's productivity.

Sectoral collaboration and stakeholder engagement with key Agencies has been positive and there is a need to continue with this as we refocus the sector in light of colleges responding to a future economy, which will demand a different set of skills, and learning approaches.

The adoption of blended learning has been accelerated and whilst work needs to be done to ensure a consistent quality of content, Borders College will use this to further progress its Digital Ambition.

Support functions have also had to rapidly adopt automated and digitalised processes to continue operating. Many of the changes have resulted in more responsive, efficient and user centred service. Borders College will continue to build upon the changes to improve the quality of its services.

Staff have worked well remotely and productivity has increased. We intend to build on this and promote a more flexible home working culture. This will reduce the need for some of our estate,

freeing up space for curriculum delivery, which previously has been a challenge, and in the longer term, reducing our estate footprint.

We welcome the focus on skills and the profile of colleges in delivering the future higher level technical skills. However, equality in funding with the HE sector is required to ensure that colleges have the capacity to respond.

Even before the economic crisis, Borders College was unable to deliver on the demand for college programmes. This included senior phase provision, adult returners and employers requesting upskilling and reskilling. We are already over capacity with applications for our Autumn enrolment and are experiencing increased inquiries to support individuals who are being made redundant and from the 30% of young people in the Borders who ordinarily progressed into employment and/or an apprenticeship. Without additional funding we will not be able to respond to the economic crisis in the Borders. This will lead to reputational damage not only to Borders College but to the whole sector with Scottish Government supporting a skills led economic recovery.

Whilst responding to the pandemic, Borders College recognises that there is also a need to keep progressing our longer term ambitions. This includes developing capacity in response to future skills needs in areas such as Green Energy and Digital skills as well as progressing economic development projects such as the Advanced Manufacturing Challenge Fund and ESECRD SMART Technologies in Health and Social Care.

Without changes to the tertiary funding and assurance systems, there is a risk that collaboration between colleges and universities reduces, with universities competing for HNC/D students and learner pathways becoming even less aligned or efficient. 15% of Borders College is HE provision. This is lower than the sector average of 19%. Small class sizes and no clear local progression routes already limits the offer. Any changes to university admissions for this cohort of students would further reduce HE provision available in the Borders.

*5. What forms of collaboration within the tertiary education eco-system would best enable a coherent and effective response to these challenges and opportunities?*

Changes to the funding methodology would enable college and universities to co-create seamless learner journeys which are not predicated on HNC/D Articulation.

Funding could also be used as a lever to ensure that students do have efficient pathways. Colleges deliver levels 7 & 8 much more cost effectively than Universities at the moment.

There is an opportunity to build on the progress of Graduate Apprenticeships. Colleges understand apprenticeships, know their local employers and can deliver Graduate Apprenticeships more cost effectively than the universities currently do. Still working in partnership with HE partners, colleges could be in the driving seat of these qualifications. Borders College co-deliver a Graduate Apprenticeship in Business with Heriot Watt. We recruited from Borders Businesses we already work with and could expand the offer and the numbers. In an era

when we need to increase upskilling and reskilling of adults this is a cost efficient and employer focused method of increasing the availability of degree level learning opportunities in the Borders.

The SFC Strategic Framework 2019-2022 focused on regional inequalities, particularly in the face of demographic changes, Brexit and rurality, and the impact of this on inclusive economic growth. The need to respond to the challenges of the South of Scotland is even more critical in light of the economic crisis emerging from COVID 19.

Through the South of Scotland Enterprise Partnership funded, Get that Degree research it is clear that the local colleges in the South of Scotland are ideally placed to extend their existing links with schools, learners and the workplace, and establish partnerships with HEIs. In order to develop increased and efficient pathways to HE, these partnerships need to be based on a mutual appreciation of the unique requirements of learners in the region.

The research highlights that articulation at Borders College is poorer than elsewhere in Scotland with only 35.1% of our students progressing with advanced standing to University compared to 48.7% across Scotland and 60% progressing with no recognition of previous learning compared to 40% in Scotland. Often, even when articulation places are available, our students do not choose to progress because of the lack of a local HE offer.

In order for colleges and universities to co-create relevant degree programmes for the SoS, funding structures need to be reviewed to reflect the role of colleges in tertiary education and to encourage further developments to better meet learner needs.

Borders College and Dumfries & Galloway College propose that a SoS Skills and Innovation Advisory Board is established to inform this work. This builds on the partnership and learning that has taken place over the last few year.

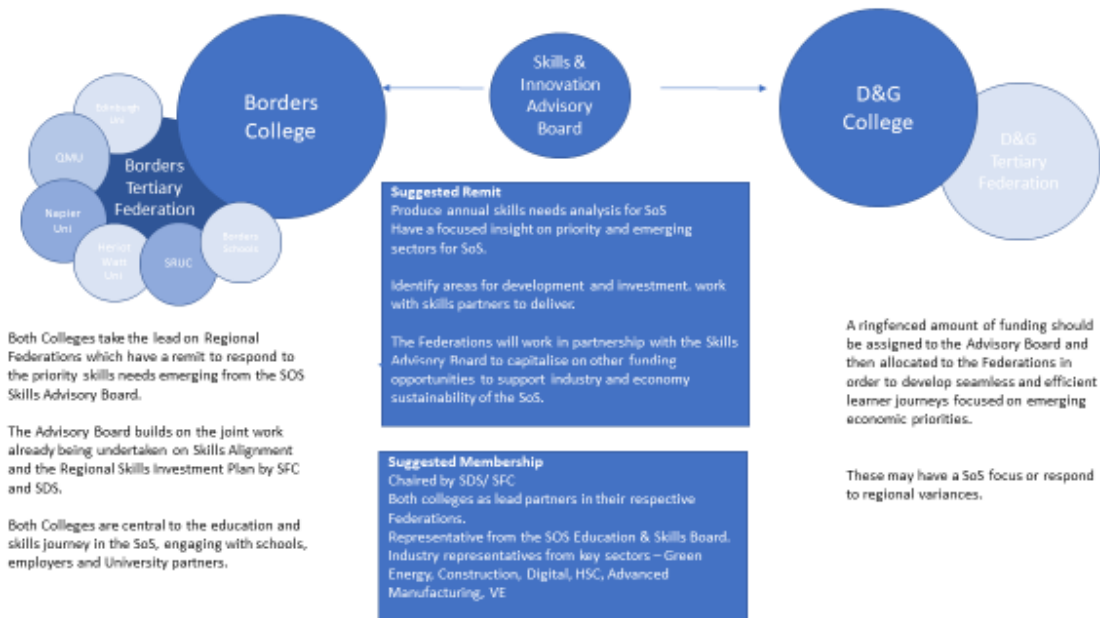
It is recognised that both colleges are richer in knowledge and capacity when we work in partnership with a range of HEIs and colleges in order to respond to the skills needs of the SoS.

The geography of the SoS means that whilst there is a commonality in the socio-economic challenges and opportunities, our respective regions are influenced and respond to the economies of the West and East of Scotland including travel to work and learning.

Therefore, it is proposed that both Colleges lead regional Federations, which include university partners, and schools who respond to the current and future skills needs identified by the SoS Skills and Innovation Advisory Board.

All the federal partners (Edinburgh, Heriot Watt, Napier, QMU, SRUC Universities) identified in the diagram below for the Borders have been consulted with and are committed to progressing in this way if the flexibilities were in place to co-create different types of tertiary learner journeys.

### South of Scotland Tertiary Eco-System Proposal



### 6. How can SFC, alongside government and other enterprise, skills and education-focused agencies, best support colleges, universities and specialist institutions to make their full contribution to Scotland's inclusive, green and education-led recovery?

The range of Scottish Government funded external bodies that Borders College deals with places a significant administrative burden, diverting resource from front-end delivery. A review of how this could be more cohesive, perhaps with the bodies sharing information more or requesting information in common formats, or by development of a single and aligned approach, would reduce this burden slightly.

Review the remit and impact of associated organisations linked to colleges such as the College Development Network, Education Scotland, Digital Skills Partnership and Energy Skills Partnership to reduce duplication and cost.

Recognise the importance of investment and capacity building within colleges to enable us to adapt our businesses in response to the future skills needs and to take advantage of the technological advances. This would provide longer term cost efficiencies and an improved customer experience. At the moment, we operate on a yearly funding allocation with little opportunity to invest in large scale capital transformation projects.

Colleges are contributing to tackling the climate emergency, both in terms of their own estates and by delivering initiatives to address the climate emergency. Borders College has reduced its carbon footprint by 34% over the last 5 years. Our new Sustainability Strategy, which responds to our ambition to be recognised as a national leader in sustainable practice, focuses on supporting behavioural changes within our communities and embedding sustainable practice and learning across our curriculum delivery.



Through the South of Scotland Enterprise Partnership investment, we have developed a range of renewable programmes for industry. These have been delivered through our Sustainable Construction STEM Hub. We are also in discussion with Borders Council partners and SoSE to develop a Sustainable Leadership Academy, hosted via our Learning & Skills Network, and Renewables training for industry located in our Sustainable Construction Hub.

Building on the investment in our Sustainable Construction STEM Hub, we are in discussion with South Lanarkshire College and Dumfries & Galloway College to establish a federal model to collaborate around Sustainable Construction and Green Energy. South Lanarkshire College have a strong reputation in this area, Dumfries & Galloway College will benefit from the energy park being developed in Annan and Borders College is working with EDF regarding the Off shore Wind Farm development at Neart Na Gaoithe and Firth of Forth with Eyemouth as the location for the Operation and Maintenance Base. Sufficient investment is required to invest in the training resources and expertise in order to respond.

Borders College has made significant progress in the last few years in progressing its digital capacity but in order to meet the expectations of digital natives and training 'on demand' from adults and employers, colleges need to have the financial flexibility and capacity to continue to invest in our digital learning and support infrastructures.

The use of artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality learning and gamification in learning engages and brings to life taught subjects. This investment would mean that more could be delivered virtually with better student attainment resulting in longer term efficiencies and an improved student experience. A consortium approach to development with all colleges accessing the resources would provide best value for money.

There is much more that can be achieved by building on the investment of £6.7 million pounds already provided to initiate the South of Scotland Learning and Skills Network. The opportunity to further enhance the network through the creation of a Digital Skills Hub in collaboration with Scotland's IS would help address the recognised digital skills need in the South of Scotland. This is a cost effective way in which public resource can be flexed in an innovative way to support the recovery in the South of Scotland.

It should also be noted that investment in "digital" initiatives, or accelerated routes to industry, out with the college sector have been a missed opportunity to capitalise on the capacity and expertise within the sector. There needs to be more awareness of the valuable contribution and credible track record colleges are able to make to support this critical aspect of the recovery.

*Realising Scotland's full potential in a Digital World* outlines a plan for ensuring that "digital" underpins all aspects of delivering inclusive economic growth, delivery of public services and readiness for the future of learning and work. It also accepts that through collaboration nobody will be left behind and will ensure that everyone remains safe, secure and confident about the future.

The Digital Skills Hub would cover a range of skills from the use and creation of digital material, from basic digital literacy, through data handling and quantitative reasoning, problem solving and computational thinking to the application of more specialist computing science knowledge and skills that are needed in data science, cyber security and coding. It would provide a single point for our schools and employers in the South of Scotland, in what is currently a cluttered landscape and a knowledge exchange network drawing on expertise and research of other partners.