

Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Call for Evidence: A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education – Colleges Scotland Response

Introduction

Colleges Scotland is pleased to provide input to Phase 1 of the SFC’s review on behalf of the college sector. Part 1 of our response sets out some general comments on the critical role of colleges in the economic recovery. Part 2 of our response provides comments in reply to each of the specific areas sought by the SFC review.

Part 1 – General Comments

Delivering Scotland’s Economic Recovery: Connecting – Collaborating – Creating

Background

The college sector is ready to play its full part in the education and skills-led economic recovery.

Colleges act as anchor points of local communities, supporting individuals of all ages and backgrounds to gain skills and qualifications, helping the most disadvantaged and furthest from the labour market, and powering regional economies by delivering the skilled workforce that businesses need.

This dynamic sector – consisting of 26 colleges across 13 college regions – is the largest skills and training provider in Scotland. Colleges invest in the futures of approximately 265,000 students and are significant employers within their respective regions, employing more than 11,000 staff.

As an agile, collaborative, and inclusive national asset, colleges play a vital role in driving Scotland’s economic, social and educational recovery by:

- playing a vital role in building back better
- supporting the requirements of the changed economy that will emerge
- improving employability of our citizens
- supporting businesses, large and small, to rebuild and re-engage their workforce
- supporting social cohesion, positive and resilient mental health and wellbeing of our communities
- seeking an inclusive and green recovery
- contributing to the Four Capitals: economic, social, human, and natural
- supporting delivery of the National Performance Framework.

Colleges Scotland looks forward to discussing the topics raised in this Call for Evidence.

Colleges Crucial Role in Economic Recovery

Colleges have a critical role to play in Scotland’s recovery, supporting Scotland’s future, getting our citizens back to work, ensuring an absolute focus on both social and economic recovery, and

contributing to the success of the changed economy of the Scotland of the future - in other words playing a vital role in helping us build back better. Colleges are critical to the capacity to re-build.

Collaborative Working

We will work with partners across the tertiary ecosystem, with schools, local government, colleagues in Community and Learning Development (CLD), Voluntary Sector, Social Enterprises and national agencies to support hard-hit communities (both urban and rural), industry sectors and employers in a post-COVID revival. However, the opportunity we have is to design and develop a collective leadership and systems approach that delivers not only a short-term recovery, but one that is engrained, to ensure that the structures and skills offer that is redefined from this point is one that will underpin Scotland's economy in the years to come and to increase the nation's productivity. This system change can build on the economies of scale of our colleges following regionalisation and can be part of a wider redefining of the public sector.

Ensuring Future Capacity

One of the key elements is to ensure that the college sector can maximise its impact, that it has the necessary resources and support to deliver the support upskilling and retraining required. Maximum flexibility is needed to help quickly address the local and regional skill shortages, unemployment, and to tailor support for industry and business. Colleges have a key role in building and maximising the social capital of Scotland, one that contributes to inclusive economic growth and takes a learner-led approach.

Commonality of Approach

Recent reports such as the Cumberford-Little, Advisory Group on Economic Recovery, and Enterprise and Skills Sub-Group have outlined key themes around the need for an education and skills-led recovery (both economic and social) and to build resilience through reskilling quickly and recognising the different regional requirements.

The reports have also highlighted:

- the importance of place, ensuring enhanced regional planning and partnerships
- the need for improved digital infrastructure
- the role of strategic public investment through a collective and cohesive endeavour.

Colleges now have a strength and economy of scale at a regional level and are well positioned to enable delivery of the shift to growth through a regional approach to economic development, and to ensure a successful new structure can be implemented that will deliver for people, places and the economy. A focus on regional planning is essential going forward, proving the necessary local flexibility within a national framework.

Colleges: Delivering for People

Delivering Skills and Opportunities for All

Colleges already play an important role in supporting learning for life, providing coherent, adaptive, flexible learning pathways through face-to-face, full-time, part-time, distance and online methods to suit the needs of individuals, including those in both schools and employment-based settings. Reaffirming the sector as a key contributor, colleges across Scotland have the flexibility and agility to quickly refocus their curriculum offer to deliver employability and digital skills, upskilling and reskilling opportunities for individuals facing unemployment or uncertainty in the job market, for individuals looking to return to the workforce, and for businesses seeking to retrain existing employees to meet changing business needs.

- Through the Flexible Workforce Development Fund (FWDF), colleges supported upskilling and reskilling programmes for 823 employers in 2018
- 146,240 enrolments in 2018-19 were by students aged 25 or over, representing 44.5% of all enrolments.

Delivering for the Most Vulnerable in our Society

The college sector has a long-established and successful track record of social inclusion and widening access to education, including those groups identified as likely to be the hardest hit through COVID-19 such as women, black people, the disabled, those from some minority ethnic backgrounds and those socio-economically disadvantaged. Colleges ensure that those who wish to do so can progress onto higher levels of study, and work closely with other training and education providers, voluntary sector agencies, local authorities and other public agencies together with universities to provide pathways on to courses.

- 32% of full-time students are from Scotland's lowest socio-economic backgrounds
- 41.8% of First Degree university entrants from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds arrived via the HNC / HND college route
- 14% of students have a recorded disability
- 9% of students are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds
- 3,650 students in colleges declared themselves to be care experienced – 1.7% of the college population, against 1.4% of the Scottish population.

Delivering for Young People

Colleges play an essential role in providing opportunities for young people and are fundamental to tackling youth unemployment. In partnership with local authorities and schools through the school curriculum, colleges offer clear vocational pathways for Senior Phase pupils, preparing them for employment and helping reduce national skills gaps. The college sector has contributed significantly to the success of the Scottish Government's Developing Young Workforce (DYW) ambitions which ensured that youth unemployment reached a historic low and it can build on this success to address the current risks.

- Colleges deliver DYW programmes to 99.2.% of Scotland's state secondary schools, supporting 6,406 Senior Phase pupils
- Colleges support work-based learning for a further 27,027 senior phase pupils, bringing the total of Senior Phase pupils engaged in qualifications delivered in partnership to 33,433.

Apprenticeships

Colleges have the agility, flexibility, capacity, and expertise to continue the delivery training of apprenticeships in a challenging labour market. Colleges adaptability has been a core characteristic through regionalisation, where scaled up institutions have been able to more flexibly deploy staff to shape new models of provision. This allows the creation of opportunities to simulate relevant work-based experiences for learners and by developing new pathways to apprenticeships through, for example, school – college collaborations. Such pathways will provide opportunities for young people to learn new and appropriate skills in preparation for when more apprenticeship opportunities arise. In addition to providing training, colleges work closely with both schools and employers in the delivery of Foundation Apprenticeships and to provide extensive wrap-around support to trainees.

- Colleges support the delivery of Foundation Apprenticeships for 1,532 Senior Phase pupils across 23 colleges and 12 industry sectors
- Colleges support 10,650 Modern Apprenticeships.

DYW

The COVID-19 pandemic risks triggering the sharpest rise in unemployment since the Great Depression. The economic recession we are about to enter will be like no other and the impact of this risks deepening inequalities, the creation of a pandemic generation and of a catastrophic impact on the prospects of an entire generation of young people, affected both by disrupted education and by poorer labour market prospects. Its scale requires a major effort from all key players to have a Team Scotland approach and to work together, to co-create solutions, to support transitions for both young people and adult returners and to rebuild and reinvigorate our communities.

There is an urgent need to protect the DYW agenda – for many young people, staying in education and training will be the right answer. The DYW agenda offers a national ‘prospectus’ which already has both national and local visibility and which employs a strength-based approach. We should seek to maximise the value of this in terms of reducing some of our national skills gaps. The regional intelligence of colleges and other partners will support this ambition.

Training Guarantee

The work commissioned by Scottish Government through Sandy Begbie’s consideration of a Job Guarantee is important, especially for young people. The college sector would like to see this initiative used to also sustain learners into employment and therefore seeks to ensure that any scheme includes a guarantee not just for jobs, but also a guarantee around free access to learning. This will assist the longer-term picture and help ensure delivery of an engrained recovery.

Colleges: Delivering for Communities

Colleges act as civic anchors which help bind communities together by providing local hubs for people to meet and access services, and offering campus amenities such as digital access, sports facilities, hair salons, beauty services, and restaurants that are affordable for the people within the local area.

Colleges have become very adept at responding successfully to stakeholder need and have been central – as lead partners – to many essential and progressive regional initiatives. As key partners within Community Planning Partnerships, Regional Economic Partnerships, City and Regional Deals, the sector’s scale following regionalisation, as well as its experience and responsiveness places it in an excellent position to play a vital role in the successful delivery of initiatives, and support future economic recovery and reform.

- Colleges have addressed digital poverty by delivering digital equipment and by enabling connectivity to students suffering hardship.
- With a predicted increase in the need for mental health counselling services, colleges are investing in new models of mental health provision, supporting prevention and early intervention
- Colleges have been central to the Scottish Government commitment to expand childcare places, increasing enrolments on HNC Childcare programmes by 43.6% and supporting 2,569 students.

Regional Strength

It is likely that there will be an uneven impact on regions across Scotland, which risks deepening pre-existing regional inequalities. Responding to this will require genuine cross-system collaboration to rebuild to the changed economy and society, and to create sustainable success for our communities. Colleges, at the heart of communities and with a reach into many of the SMEs who are the bedrock of a community and the economy, as well as the larger industrial players, are ideally placed to bring the social recovery that will be vital to help Scotland at this time and into the future, to build back better and to engrain the benefits of the recovery.

Colleges: Delivering for the Economy

Economic Value

In September 2017, Colleges Scotland commissioned the Fraser of Allander Institute to prepare a report on the contribution of college graduates to Scotland’s economy. This study showed that the Scottish economy (as measured by GDP) will be better off by over £20 billion over the long term, which corresponds to around an additional £55,000 boost to productivity for the Scottish economy for each college graduate.

A summary of the results from this report is provided below and highlights the significant, positive impact the college sector has on Scotland’s economy:

The Scottish economy (as measured by GDP) will be better off by over £20 billion in present value term (i.e. with future benefits discounted) over the long-term.

This corresponds to around an additional £55,000 boost to productivity for the Scottish economy per graduate.

The investment is estimated to support nearly 14,000 FTE jobs in present value terms.

Delivering for a Green Economy

Colleges are contributing to tackling the climate emergency, both in terms of their own estates and by delivering initiatives to address the climate emergency, for example:

- The carbon footprint of the college sector has reduced by 18% in the last two years
- Development of cleaner transport initiatives
- Training of the existing workforce, students and apprentices in renewable energy and energy transition
- There were 1,685 enrolments in green economy courses in 2018-19
- Tackling gender imbalance within the energy sector, e.g. Girls into Energy Programmes
- Partnership working in relation to hydrogen-based infrastructures.

Delivering for a Digital Economy

The college sector is determined to develop and enhance the learning experience to ensure it encapsulates the full range of technology, such as artificial intelligence, augmented and virtual reality learning, with the best available equipment to maximise the potential of colleges to deliver work-based learning, contribute to increased economic productivity, inward investment and meet the changing needs of users. A Digital Ambition and roadmap are being developed by the sector which will enable it to support the full range of learners accessing college-based learning platforms across Scotland. It will also ensure that colleges can quickly respond to the changing needs of the labour market and deliver skills for the new economy 4.0.

Delivering for Employers

Colleges make a fundamental contribution to Scotland's labour market, helping to meet employers' needs and ensuring that students have the right skills and training to succeed in the workplace. College education contributes to boosting the quality as well as quantity of employment options for graduating students, with 96% of all learning hours leading to a recognised qualification. Colleges work closely with both SMEs and large employers in their local regions, shaping their curriculum offer to meet the skills needs of the local economy, and providing retraining and upskilling opportunities. These are key areas where colleges will increasingly contribute going forward.

The sector has a substantial role in responding to:

- growing unemployment levels – expected to rise sharply once the UK Government's Job Retention Scheme ends
- supporting the Scottish Government's PACE activity which will become vital in responding to redundancy and company closure.

Developed in partnership with industry, colleges' agility has shown a track record of allowing them to focus provision on speedy, short, sharp courses to enable those unemployed to quickly transition from declining sectors into jobs in growth areas, such as construction, digital, automation, health and social care, green economy, early years, artificial intelligence, and STEM.

The college sector's flexibility enables them to support:

- 238,111 (72.4%) part-time enrolments in 2018-19
- 49,386 students studying health and social care courses in 2018-19 (14.9% at higher education (HE))
- 21,138 construction course enrolments in 2018-19 (11.9% at HE)
- 23,868 digital skills enrolments in 2018-19 (16.9% at HE), and 98,516 STEM enrolments in 2018-19 (14.9% at HE)
- 95,637 students while they are in employment,

Colleges are also flexing their course offering to address skills shortages in high participation sectors such as logistics, transport, hospitality and childcare, as well as having the flexibility to input when and where other specific areas are identified as requiring a response.

The sector is encouraging and supporting an innovative economy, working closely with Innovation Centres, providing business incubator space, ensuring access to resources to aid start-up ventures, and developing strategic partnerships with businesses and universities to drive global investment opportunities into manufacturing, technology and innovation hubs, which will drive growth in the Scottish economy for decades to come.

Part 2 – Response to Specific Questions

In the response to the specific questions raised in the SFC review document, please read these in the context of the general comments made in Part 1 and the key role that colleges will need to play in order to support individuals, communities, and business in the national response to the economic recovery.

A). 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 and innovation in Scotland that we most prize, in a very challenging funding environment?

The college sector in Scotland has a rich history of responding quickly and effectively and adapting to the impact of economic crises by mobilising its collective resources to provide impactful, cost effective solutions to skills needs. Colleges are part of a national sector but are also individual organisations which are best placed to respond proactively to the needs and direction of local communities within an overarching framework for the sector. This is a valuable approach that should not be lost. If there is to be a further focus on regionalisation, this may need a better alignment of boundaries and/or mechanisms established to coordinate larger regional responses in larger geographical areas.

Individual

Greater collaboration within the education and skills system has emerged through the principle of putting learners at the centre. Colleges offer much more than a learning and teaching experience, they enhance the learner experience by providing a 'wrap around' service which supports the learners throughout their journey and helps them to gain confidence and the wider skills needed for today's society. Colleges also contribute to addressing complex social issues such as child poverty, equality and diversity, employability, gender inequality, care experienced and other underrepresented groups, increasing their valuable contribution to society and our regional and national economy.

A focus on accessibility for all stages has been a key feature of college provision and should be key to future development, however, this must encompass upskilling and reskilling across all age groups.

Community

Colleges are a fundamental part of their region and the communities they serve: promoting economic growth alongside social inclusion and supporting learners from a diverse range of ages, backgrounds and educational levels; offering multiple opportunities to engage in learning for life through a collection of different subjects, study options and modes of delivery.

Economy

Colleges help to increase productivity by providing upskilling, training and retraining opportunities. Colleges across Scotland work in close partnership with employers of all types, providing the skills, learning opportunities and experiences to learners to enable them to deliver fundamental and essential services to operate, strengthen and deliver a robust wellbeing economy. Furthermore, coherence across the skills landscape will create an even greater opportunity to match ambition to the offer, drawing on expertise and building on synergies across institutions aligned to economic growth.

Staff

Colleges have a staff body with a wide range of skillsets and expertise. This is important when it comes to new opportunities/projects and allows colleges to be able to respond quickly and effectively to changing demands and needs.

Colleges should retain the ability to assess holistically (following robust internal QA processes) as well as the flexibility to modify assessment evidence criteria to suit remote/online delivery.

Partnerships

Regional partnerships with local authorities, schools, universities and employers are fundamental to providing a range of clear and distinct pathways. The growth of the senior phase provision provides more options and choices for a wide range of age groups. Colleges will continue to work closely with Community Planning Partnerships.

At a regional level, colleges have the connections and partnerships with local charities, voluntary and community groups to reach the most disadvantaged within our communities. By pooling and making best use of the wide range of resources that are available through these partnerships to encourage, nurture and support those learners going through, often the most challenging of circumstances, this changes lives through learning. This could include aligning provision of learning opportunities within key strategies e.g. drug and alcohol services, homelessness and looking for opportunities to contribute to service delivery through joined up commissioning to specialist providers in the voluntary sector.

The sector's requests are:

- Prioritise greater flexibility within delivery and funding models to better support colleges to increase the economic, social, natural and human capital (as referenced by the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery report, published 2020) of the regions they serve, through maximising regional opportunities and minimising and addressing regional challenges. This would by necessity need to include a parity of funding across the tertiary ecosystem.
- Explore a more joined up approach to funding instead of the current multiple funding pots.
- Focus more on measuring outputs of social and economic impacts, and less on a single volume target.
- Reduce competition between schools/colleges/universities by removing duplication to increase efficiency and allow more effective use of current resources across the whole system, including avoiding duplication at SCQF level 7.
- Create equity for learners by taking a national approach to articulation, for example, exploring a standard '2+2' model for appropriate subjects.
- Funding to organisations by bodies such as Skills Development Scotland should also be urgently reviewed in terms of value for money and focussed investment of public funds.

B). What do you think colleges should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery?

Colleges should be given more flexibility in the delivery of their courses, moving away from the traditional on-campus delivery model where this does not meet the needs of the learners or employers. This will also support ongoing ambitions in terms of learning for life with seamless entry and exit of education at stages that meet learner needs, as well as clear progression pathways to HE. There could be tax incentives for employers to create links through colleges.

To support this, there is a need to focus on the digital capacity of the sector, households and Scotland to not only continue to deliver teaching and skills development during the pandemic period, but to also introduce the flexibility of provision needed.

Colleges are keen to see stronger collaboration and integration of curriculum with schools and universities and undertake regional strategic planning across the education sector to meet local, regional and national needs.

The contribution colleges make to innovation and knowledge exchange should be recognised, supported by specific funding to create an innovative, creative and dynamic environment for learning, skills and training.

The recently published Cumberford-Little report identified the need to enhance the use of college certified qualifications, and more use of 'micro-credentials' to support a new college purpose. This need is greater than ever in supporting the recovery. A degree of inflexibility and lack of currency within the existing post-16 accredited qualifications portfolio, particularly within the Higher National suite of awards, has not provided the flexibility that the college sector seeks. This process of qualifications development and subsequent commissioning needs reviewed to be more closely linked to sector need.

Colleges must be allowed to retain their focus on social inclusion, enhancing opportunities in disadvantaged communities which will be hit hard by the downturn. Campus-based delivery will be essential to meet the needs of many learners, including those from disadvantaged communities, those with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Colleges must be sufficiently resourced to enable them to invest in staff development to assist in developing and enhancing skills to deliver effective learning online (including provision for vulnerable groups in regard to improving quality of life) and more efficient business infrastructure. This should include a more flexible workforce beyond the current structure so helping to accelerate the aspirations of 'the work force of the future'.

The sector's requests are:

- Seek a national framework which provides greater flexibility in the delivery of courses and which allows for a focus on regional planning and partnership in order to deliver stronger collaboration and integration around curriculum.
- A system that strengthens and supports the college sector's focus on social inclusion.
- A focus on digital capacity of colleges to support the flexibility of learning required.
- The Job Guarantee scheme to include access to free training as well as to employment, to help sustain learners into jobs.
- A new Apprenticeship Pathway Programme as a valuable way of developing skills in key sectors for people who are not yet in employment.
- An expanded FWDF should assist employers of all sizes, including SMEs and microbusinesses, in upskilling and reskilling their staff.
- Additional support should be targeted at Transitional Training, to help unemployed people enhance their skills while seeking new employment.

C). How can colleges best support Scotland's international connectedness and competitiveness in the post-pandemic, post-EU membership environment?

Colleges are committed to a Team Scotland approach and collaboratively utilise Scotland's advantages i.e. rich history, culture and educational excellence, when promoting the country as a study destination.

The connectedness of colleges internationally will be improved through continued involvement or 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.

Collaboration between universities and colleges should be promoted and supported by Government to ensure that Scotland is exploiting fully its tertiary sector assets.

The sector's requests are:

- A system that allows collaboration to take a Team Scotland approach and supports an increase in capacity.
- Ensure ability for Scotland's college to fully participate in ERASMUS+.

D). What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges?

Opportunities

Opportunities include:

- The creation of a more responsive and digitally skilled workforce
- A wider range of online/blended provision
- A wider range of ways in which learners can engage with the college
- A review of services and systems to make them user-centred, efficient, more effective, and less bureaucratic
- Enhanced learning platforms
- Opportunities to work closer with other colleges, universities and WorldSkills
- Enhance more strategic partnerships
- Raise the profile of the college sector and its ability to respond
- Opportunities to drive much needed streamlining of qualifications and awarding bodies processes
- Capitalising on the opportunities that COVID-19 has brought to the connectedness of everyone as a community to drive positive change, with agility and removing barriers to change
- Increased regional engagement with potential learners especially those facing unemployment.

Threats

The threats are primarily funding related to ensure that colleges have the capacity to meet demand and have the necessary flexibility and funding to build the capabilities to meet the evolving (and as yet unpredictable) needs of the recovery to the new economy. Prior to the pandemic, colleges were already facing significant financial challenges and were actively considering how to plan effectively for the future in a climate of annual funding allocations. Consideration should be given to multi-year funding and guidance.

Other threats include:

- Managing the ongoing pandemic has the potential to limit the ability of the sector to focus on longer term projects
- Financial instability due to reduced income/funding

- Digital Poverty – connectivity, hardware, environment
- Digital capability of staff.

The sector's requests are:

- A response in keeping with the scale of the economic challenge and which supports the requirement of a major effort from all key players and to have a Team Scotland approach and to work together, to co-create solutions.
- Provide a framework and finance model to allow colleges across Scotland to have the flexibility and agility to quickly refocus their curriculum offer to deliver employability and digital skills, upskilling and reskilling opportunities for individuals to respond to, and to support the economic recovery.
- Ensure opportunities to allow streamlining of qualifications and awarding bodies processes.
- Support in delivery of the identified digital priorities around access, development of course content and staff capabilities.

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

Standardising the articulation routes by moving to a '2+2' or a '2+1' model of delivery of an honours or ordinary degree, respectively. This would ensure that all institutions give the same recognition for the same qualification when the learner is applying to the same or similar course at the same SCQF level. These would assist in shortening the learner journey, without reducing its benefits for learners, thus helping to produce a workforce of greater productivity and skill, allowing more people from all backgrounds to participate in the labour market more quickly and bringing greater economic benefit. The work started by the National Articulation Forum should be continued.

Colleges and universities must establish closer strategic alignment to ensure the provision and pathways are student focused and not institution focused, with a more holistic regional approach to planning taken to ensure pathways are clear, well planned and seamless for learners, and to avoid duplication around SCQF level 7 through joint planning for demand led regional provision (e.g. through the Regional Improvement Collaboratives).

The sector's requests are:

- A system that has full recognition of previously gained qualification when the learner is applying to the same or similar course at the same SCQF level and build on the work of the recently published report from the National Articulation Forum.
- A rationalisation of the existing examinations and assessment landscape.

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

How scarce public resources should be prioritised to drive recovery

Public resources should be directed to public institutions and not toward private training organisations who factor profit margins into their activity. A review of all resources available to meet the needs of each region should be undertaken and allocated based on impact for individuals and the community rather than on established bureaucratic and outdated funding models.

Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions

We believe that innovation and productivity will be improved through a more strategic and dynamic control environment for the college sector, that supports the required flexibilities sought, reduces bureaucracy, and brings rationalisation.

A focus on regional economic clusters of employers would help develop regional specialisms for the economy. Matching support for business start-up, skills development and FE/HE provision could foster the sense of regional economic specialisms.

The current SFC/Education Scotland model for Evaluative Reports and Enhancement Plan has created a system whereby targets are reviewed with the aim of complementing SFC monitoring and reflecting on the quality indicators in 'How Good is Our College'. Whilst the system has created collaboration between college's, SFC and Education Scotland it has led to a system that does not best drive enhancement.

Adaptations to SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery

SFC's funding and accountability frameworks require a review to ensure they promote agile and collaborative action, to ensure that equality and wide access to educational opportunity are promoted as key elements of the recovery for younger people and adults.

For colleges to be able to respond agilely to developing challenges, there needs to be increased flexibility in the model within which the sector operates and more support for emerging best practice. The Outcome Agreement process, for example, whilst successful in aligning college strategic priorities with Government policy, has in recent times restricted the ambition of colleges to respond to local need.

Freedom for colleges to generate and use surpluses would create a more creative and agile sector, which would allow colleges to exercise effective stewardship and manage resources to best effect.

The production of an SFC capital investment plan which sets out a medium/longer term investment plan for colleges' physical and digital infrastructure needs would also be vital.

How SFC's funding and accountability frameworks should ensure that equality and wide access to educational opportunity are promoted as key elements of the recovery for younger people and adults

Promotion of equality and widening access is and will continue to be a key priority for all organisations involved in the tertiary sector. The outcome agreement model has enshrined targets for institutions and a similar more dynamic model that places responsibility and accountability on individual organisations would be preferred.

Specific access targets within a ROA could be considered where these targets are relevant to local demographics.

What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment

The SFC and Scottish Government should recognise the wealth of experience within the college sector and allow the flexibility for individual institutions to respond and be proactive in response to the particular needs of their local communities, employers, and students.

The SFC and other agencies (SDS, SQA, Scottish Enterprise etc.) must work together better and look at a more holistic, joined-up approach to ensure systems are designed around the user, to be more flexible, agile and effective.

The existing funding models for universities and colleges should be reviewed. The significantly lower resources provided to colleges compared to universities is unfair and unjustified and inevitably impacts on the relative student experience. With continued downward pressure on SFC's resources, a fundamental overhaul of the funding landscape is required as a matter of urgency.

The Scottish Government and SFC should work together to create clearer and more flexible planned funding for institutions, moving away from year to year funding to better support the longer term planning needed, which will address low educational attainment, low productivity and poor economic wellbeing.

Introduce a smaller set of ROA targets that are more realistic and impact focused. This includes reviewing Education Scotland's role in the ROA process and what impact/value they bring to the enhancement of the learner experience.

The current models of funding with DYW in schools, colleges and universities do not allow for the most cost-effective route. There is a need to streamline routes from schools to further and higher education which make it attractive for students and employers. There is often little incentive for employers to collaborate in the development of skills and current models of education, meaning it takes longer for students to enter their labour market. If companies were given tax incentives to work with schools, college and universities on industry ready students, and, in addition, if the delivery of qualifications were compressed and funding models adjusted, this would give opportunity to create routes through the current school DYW, college and university that would achieve a more effective throughput of students to the workplace.

The impact of COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of outdoor learning in supporting sustainability and promoting the health and wellbeing of people of all ages. Additional support from the SFC would allow colleges to focus efforts on building on existing outdoor learning opportunities.

The sector's requests are:

- Review SFC's funding and accountability frameworks to ensure promotion of agile and collaborative action, to ensure that equality and wide access to educational opportunity are promoted as key elements of the recovery.
- The existing funding model for colleges should be reviewed, ensuring the provision of equity of resources across the tertiary education landscape.
- Delivery of a more strategic and dynamic control environment for the college sector, that supports the required flexibilities sought, reduces bureaucracy, and brings rationalisation.
- Work towards a system that provides freedom for colleges to generate and use surpluses.
- The production of an SFC capital investment plan which sets out a medium/longer term investment plan for colleges' physical and digital infrastructure.
- Investing in improved guidance services for learners of all ages to help them identify relevant opportunities and the benefits of participating in education.
- Continue to work with the sector to significantly rationalise credit guidance rules to support increased innovation and productivity.

Colleges Scotland
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