

Scottish Funding Council 'A Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability in Further and Higher Education'

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<p><b>A).</b> 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?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The capacity of colleges to operate is a key concern given substantial reductions in forecast income for 20/21 and beyond. Without significant support from Government (UK and/or Scottish) there is a real danger that colleges will simply be forced to reduce costs to the level that makes them unsustainable and removes their capacity to deliver education and training.</li> <li>• Scotland's Colleges have a long and successful track record in promoting social inclusion and engaging people, particularly in the poorest SIMD areas and offering a route through to economic inclusion.</li> <li>• Over many years the college sector has demonstrated great ability to respond flexibly to workforce and employer needs.</li> <li>• The location of college campuses within distinct communities anchors the college and its provision to address the specific needs of local communities and employers in curriculum planning and delivery.</li> <li>• Scotland's colleges are the dynamic nuclei of their communities with effective local and regional networks. However, increasingly community-based provision relies on additional funding from sources such as Local Authorities, as, due to small class sizes, this provision is expensive to run. If the offering to communities is to remain strong, some form of premium or weighting should be considered.</li> <li>• Access courses are a particularly strong feature of the educational offering in FE, from Community links into college and helping those with few or no qualifications to gain confidence and skills with which to progress. ESOL courses are also significant in helping the migrant population to become a skilled and integrated part of the Scottish economy. Without college courses these groups would be left with few options and may be unable to access employment.</li> <li>• The unnecessary distinction between further and higher education is unhelpful and a binary view of the post-compulsory education sector which potentially entrenches unhelpful perspective about the value of differing levels of provision.</li> </ul>
<p><b>B).</b> What do you think colleges should stop doing, or do differently, in order to contribute effectively to an inclusive social and economic recovery? (SFC suggest that you may wish to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner journeys are still far too long – we need to be weaned from year-long programmes and remove the funding restrictions that keep them in place.</li> </ul>

<p>comment on teaching and skills development, sectoral and employer needs and employability, research, innovation and knowledge exchange, widening access and equalities issues.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater collaboration and sharing knowledge and practice across the college sector – demands and responsibilities on regional colleges (and senior staff) mean that opportunities for genuine knowledge exchange that might lead to efficiencies rarely take place.</li> <li>• There must be a step-change in our on-line delivery, which will require that staff skills are developed and digital infrastructure improved.</li> <li>• Whilst there is currently strong partnership working with the School sector, there is still work to be done here to ensure all schools engage with the college sector to help learners understand the opportunities available to them. What is most pressing, however, is that the College sector works in partnership with industry to fully understand the skills required and work swiftly and flexibly to meet the demands.</li> <li>• Colleges should not yearn to fill the space of universities, but instead be proud of our ability to support those who face barriers to education and who need greater support and encouragement to build the foundations of their learning in order to reach their vocational goal. What is important is that we move away from longer courses and develop quick, relevant learning which meets the needs of employers and helps learners to progress.</li> </ul>
<p><b>C).</b> How can colleges best support Scotland’s international connectedness and competitiveness in the post-pandemic, post-EU membership environment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating with each other to take on larger commercial opportunities than they could do alone.</li> <li>• Colleges are funded solely for the delivery of provision of courses and not currently funded to pursue international business which makes it very difficult to find the resource in terms of staff time to create growth in this area. Funding to support international business development would help the sector grow this very large source of potential income.</li> <li>• Central support from Scottish Government in representing the Scottish national capability of the college sector would help the colleges develop international business.</li> <li>• More collaboration between colleges and university sectors in areas like international student recruitment (2+2 models) which would create very attractive and financially competitive offerings for international students or Graduate and Technical apprenticeships (college expertise in workplace assessment + university expertise in higher level formal delivery).</li> <li>• Enhancement of our online offerings may create new opportunities.</li> <li>• The creation and delivery of vocational degree programmes delivered by colleges and accredited nationally would provide flexible and affordable provision to employers and society. Similar to the former CCNA ‘sandwich degrees’ (Not the same as a graduate apprenticeship) The current UK immigration rules present a major barrier to colleges fully engaging in an International marketplace. There is significant risk to colleges when considering entering the</li> </ul>

<p>accountability frameworks to promote agile and collaborative action by the sectors to build Scotland's recovery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• What support SFC and government could give institutions to adapt to a changed environment.</li> </ul>	<p>SDS provide excellent labour market intelligence, (they have been less successful in designing qualifications such as FAs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at the double funding that exists in the learner journey.</li> <li>• Short-term injection of funding to enable Colleges to retain their staff resources at a time when they will be key to the economic recovery.</li> <li>• Funds (for initiatives such as Apprenticeship Pathways and Transitional Training) to support learners who do not yet have a job, or who have lost their job.</li> <li>• Additional training resource for employers through an expanded and more flexible FWDF.</li> <li>• Additional resource to support Digital Learning (upskilling of staff, digital resources for students).</li> <li>• An approach to accountability that will encourage Colleges to be agile. The intense bureaucracy and target-setting associated with Outcome Agreements are not helpful at this time. The targets and activities outlined in the annual ministerial letter to SFC have grown exponentially over the years. There needs to be a clear focus on the role that colleges are to play in the tertiary education system – with clarity of purpose rather than an ever expanding wish list of demands.</li> <li>• Future funding model should be flexible enough to meet learners' evolving needs in longer term but be stable enough to ensure Colleges can plan effectively.</li> <li>• Many colleges already have facilities and expertise to teach the skills necessary for unlocking the green economy in many sectors however this is currently often small in scale and would require investment to scale-up</li> <li>• The restriction of ONS classification of the college sector has created a situation where college finances are unnecessarily fragile. Some relaxation of rules relating to surplus generation, cash-holding and borrowing would make colleges more resilient.</li> <li>• The credit-based system for funding courses should be more flexible to enable more adaptable and agile courses to be developed.</li> <li>• Funding of MAs should be open to older age groups to enable those facing redundancy or long-term unemployment to access employment opportunities.</li> <li>• The prioritisation of funding to younger learners has led to a reduction in participation on shorter courses by older students. The consequence of this has been a less diverse student cohort.</li> </ul>
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	<p>potentially financially rewarding overseas student market.</p>
<p><b>D).</b> What opportunities and threats does the post-pandemic environment hold for colleges? How are you planning to address these challenges and opportunities?</p>	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a current and serious threat to the financial solvency of Scotland’s colleges due to directly to lost income arising from the post-pandemic economic slow-down. Without rapid financial support colleges will be required to undertake radical restructuring which will have long-term consequences for their ability to respond to the needs of our communities.</li> <li>• If we are required to do more delivery online, we need support in tackling digital poverty otherwise we simply cannot engage with all of our learners. Statistics demonstrate that, even in an urban area such as Glasgow, there is a significant percentage of households with little or no Internet connectivity.</li> <li>• Colleges who support themselves with commercial income face serious financial shortfall as private businesses cut training budgets or longstanding customers cease trading.</li> <li>• Issues around the way that awarding bodies operate and the current assessment processes pose significant threats to colleges – the nature of vocational qualifications and the scale of practical, work-based assessments place huge demands on colleges when this model is curtailed. There are opportunities to consider delivery models and assessment strategies that offer greater flexibility and more holistic approaches – especially where over assessment is a burden to colleges.</li> <li>• The impact of national bargaining has been to reduce flexibility, inhibited responsiveness to local priorities and significantly increase costs. The resultant model of delivery is not fit-for-purpose to meet the evolving needs of our communities or the economy. To ensure that college meet the needs of our communities we need more flexibility and a new efficient delivery model – eg around teaching hours, sessions per week etc</li> <li>• A period of stability to focus on the quality of learning, teaching and assessment is required. It is essential that the sector improves its focus in this area because approaches to pedagogy are at best ‘hit and mis’</li> <li>• Should face-to-face campus delivery be further disrupted by future resurgences of COVID-19 this will impact most heavily on already disadvantaged student groups</li> </ul> <p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rapid switchover to remote and digital learning platforms make institutions less reliant on their estate and opens them to a wider range of markets.</li> <li>• The relaxation of some over stringent assessment standards. Qualifications need to be deliverable in multiple contexts and in Scotland they rarely are.</li> <li>• Opportunities come from the vast range of reskilling and upskilling that will be required for</li> </ul>

	<p>the economic recovery. Colleges are already engaged with Skills Development Scotland and other agencies to deliver real and practical support to individuals and businesses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With Colleges developing their online delivery capacity, these needs can be addressed more flexibly and efficiently than in the past.</li> <li>• Teaching delivery model needs to be modernised at a tertiary education sector level to be fit for purpose in future. If digital poverty is addressed this could make learning more accessible to wider learner base rather than less.</li> <li>• Could a National framework agreement be developed for Colleges to flexibly appoint Associates/Tutors/Trainers particularly to support a new teaching delivery model as this evolves over time?</li> <li>• Colleges have well-established relationships and networks with public, private, representative and third-sector organisations which make them ideally situated to act as a conduit for targeted interventions</li> <li>• There is an opportunity to grow Access level courses and to link these more specifically to industry needs. Greater career advice and development needs to be built into courses. There will be a need to support those industries which have fallen into difficult times, such as hospitality, and adapt courses to helping these target groups. Colleges have a proven track record in responding to fluctuations in employment levels and have demonstrated their ability to address the needs of long-term or newly unemployed individuals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>E).</b> What forms of collaboration within the tertiary education eco-system would best enable a coherent and effective response to these challenges and opportunities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tertiary education within Scotland should be viewed as one, joined-up system with seamless pathways for learners. Funding methodology needs to be significantly overhauled to ensure parity of funding between University and College sectors</li> <li>• Stronger, single college voice in relation to shaping outputs from awarding bodies, skills sectors etc</li> <li>• The regional structure has enabled a coherent and effective response within the College sector. However, the existence in Glasgow of a separate regional board is inefficient, adding an unnecessary layer of significant cost and substantial bureaucracy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>F).</b> 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? SFC suggest that in particular, you may wish to draw out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How scarce public resources should be prioritised to drive recovery</li> <li>• Particular areas of collaboration between agencies that would best support the sectors' contributions</li> <li>• Adaptations to SFC's funding and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We should consider the value for money of particular routes and pathways – colleges deliver some SCQF levels at a far lower cost.</li> <li>• Programmes developed by agencies such as SDS need to be funded at an appropriate level and this is not always the case. For example, Foundation Apprenticeships, considered by Scottish Government to be a very important element of the senior phase curriculum, are at best break even under the current funding rules and there is a danger that colleges may have to withdraw from offering this provision.</li> <li>• Using a greater percentage of bursary or capital funding to alleviate digital poverty.</li> <li>• We should clarify the roles of some agencies –</li> </ul>