Overview

The City of Glasgow College is supportive of the Government’s Reform agenda for the College sector and has in fact pioneered some of this reform as evidenced by our successful delivery of a complex 3-way merger yielding both educational and efficiency gains, our Ministerial and Parliamentary briefings, our merger support centre and the excellent progress made in the procurement through the new NPD model of our two site campus.

However, whilst we endorse much of the proposed Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill, we wish to highlight serious misgivings about three issues, which we believe if left unaddressed will ultimately undermine the practical impact of this legislation.

As Scotland’s largest College, responsible for one in ten of all college learners, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with the Education and Culture Committee.

The Disparity of a Large College with a Small Board

The Bill’s proposal to half the size of our current Board, to in effect make it less representative, to remove much of its local incorporated autonomy and to relegate the Principal & Chief Executive to the sidelines, runs counter to effective accountability and good governance.

Whilst we recognise that Boards shouldn’t be unnecessarily big – with multiple co-optees and observers – we are also acutely aware, as a College of significant scale, with a pivotal role in the economic development of Scotland, that there are real risks in making College Boards too small. This is a critical and unique issue for us in the Glasgow Region, where we are likely to have three large Colleges with small Boards, as distinct from the vast majority of other colleges, which will be governed by Regional Board’s of 12-18 members.

Removing every second member of our current Board would compromise the committee structure of our new college, which we deliberately established to ensure good governance. This will weaken its capacity to govern a college with the biggest expenditure, the largest estates development, with a 25 year NPD contractual commitment, one of the largest workforces (983 FTE), the biggest financial turnover of (£57.4M) and the most diverse student cohort (31,000 students from 135 different nationalities) in the sector.
We would recommend that, in multi college regions, the regional strategic body be given delegated authority to determine, and keep under review, the size of their constituent college boards, within wider parameters than those currently proposed.

**Trans-Regional Learning**

Secondly, whilst the draft legislation may define the various regions, their respective strategic bodies, boards and administration, it seems to make no provision for metropolitan colleges that already transcend regions with curricula of national and international importance such as Maritime and Food & Hospitality.

The Bill is silent on the metropolitan pull effect, of the larger urban colleges, which are well served by a comprehensive public transport network. More than 50% of our students come from outside of Glasgow.

**Need for Review**

Thirdly, given the weight of expectation and transformational change ahead for the college sector, we recommend that the proposed legislation guard against being too prescriptive or inflexible as new developments will emerge. Again, delegated authority could be granted to Regional Boards to negate the need for multiple legislative amendments. We would remind the committee that the college sector has an excellent track record for embracing change both positively and pragmatically.

**In Conclusion**

The City of Glasgow College supports regionalisation and the drive for improvements and efficiencies across the sector, to deliver better outcomes for learners and the economy as a whole.

Over the next few years, with considerable change taking place across the sector, a level of stability will be crucial for colleges. The depth and breadth of experience and also skills of our board members will still be essential for an organisation of our complexity, given that we will be larger than most regional colleges.

The Bill cannot adopt a 'one size fits all' solution – different approaches must be taken to deal with issues specific to certain colleges or regions, including trans-regional and trans-national issues.

City of Glasgow College is fully committed to delivering the benefits and maximising the opportunities of regionalisation and to ensuring that learners remain at the centre of everything that we do. We need a strong and knowledgeable board to ensure that we can achieve the Government’s ambitions, which we whole heartedly support.